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He Fell Among Thieves

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AND

HENRY HERMAN

AUTHORS OF "THE BISHOPS' BIBLE," ETC.

Authorized Edition

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150 WORTH STREET, CORNER MISSION PLACE

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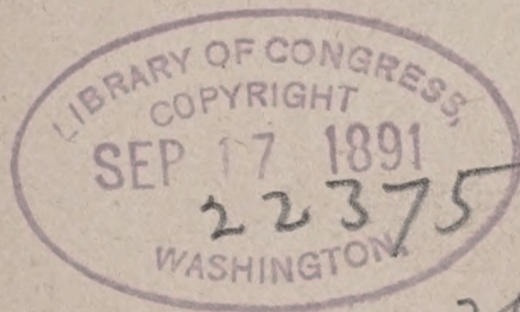
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HE FELL AMONG THIEVES.

CHAPTER I.

THE Five-Year-Old Club, in Albemarle Street, was originally started for a purpose which, in the eyes of its founder at least, was one of the most laudable in the world. The venerable Earl of Bridgebourne and his equally venerable crony General Ingoldsbey were lamenting, as elderly gentlemen will do upon occasion, the decadence of the times. They agreed with conviction that nothing was as good as it used to be. The weather was not as warm, the port was not so well flavoured or so wholesome, the young women were not as pretty as they used to be. The Most Noble the Marquis of Becksworth sat by and listened to the diatribes of his friends, and by and by offered them a new theme for sorrow in respect to which all three grew eloquent. The women, the wine, and the weather were past mending, but in the matter suggested by the marquis there was something to be done. He spoke of the rarity of

mutton killed for the table at a proper age, and the venerable earl, in a flush of inspiration, created by the mere utterance of a phrase the Five-Year-Old Club. The association had no other purpose than the rearing of five-year-old mutt on for its members' eating but before a month was over, president, vice-president, committee, treasurer, and secretary, were all elected, a goodly list of members had enrolled themselves, a breed of sheep had been selected to experiment upon, and a fair-sized scrap of land on Dartmoor had been rented by the club. Then for a month or two the reports of the head grazier were read with an appetizing interest, and the attendance of members fell off rapidly as it became clear to the least observant that a five-year-old sheep took at least five years to grow up in. Before six months had gone by since the date of its foundation the club had grown to be one of the dullest and most neglected of resorts. Nobody could talk even of five-year-old mutton for ever; the association possessed no other interest, and very few of its members had any other theme in common. The call for the second annual subscription met with a languid response. Youth is popularly supposed to be the season of impatience, but youth at least has time for waiting. Some of the elderly contingent dropped away by the act of nature, and a good many others were doubtful of their own lives being long enough to bring them to the promised land of gourmandise. Some of the veterans were put upon water-gruel and the like poor diet by relentless medical advisers, and under these conditions found their interest in haunch and saddle fade rapidly away. In short, before a

single joint of the club mutton had ever decorated the club-table the association itself had practically gone out of existence.

There was the flock on Dartmoor, its venerable elders ripe within a month or two for the sacrificial knife—there was the head grazier sending up a quarterly report to be read by nobody, there was the scrap of moorland experimentally leased for one and twenty years, and there were the club premises rented for the same period. But there was practically no club.

In these circumstances Captain Peter Heaton appeared upon the scene. He was a man of perspicacity and energy, and he had in one way or another a certain little capital at his command. He saw the potentialities of the club as a proprietary concern, and after due negotiation purchased its belongings and was free to use its name. His chief initial difficulty lay in finding somebody to deal with, but that being surmounted the way lay plain and easy before him.

The taste for good mutton not being exclusively confined to the elderly members of the aristocracy, the worthy captain, with his stock-in-trade in hand, found no difficulty in getting about him a company of the younger sort. Excellent names, not quite so well known, so solid or respectable as the earlier, but excellent still, were found for the committee. But whether the new members were drawn towards Captain Peter Heaton by the process of natural selection or not it is certain that they were a curiously raffish and disorderly set of people. They kept abnormal hours, and drank fancifully named drinks from the afternoon

beginning of their day until the morning close of it. They gambled heavily, and willingly paid to the club proprietor absurd sums for gambling tools and gambling time. There were plenty of young men of title among them, and here and there in their ranks an elderly peer who might have been supposed to know better than to waste his time in the pursuits and society of the Five-Year-Old Club. There were mashers from the Guards, the genuine, undoubted, and undoubtable thing, and imitation mashers from outside, whose social coin rang false to discerning ears. There were florid, vulgar turfites and sporting journalists, permanently stale with eleemosynary champagne. There were actors there who had walked from the drawing-room to the stage leaving their breeding midway. There were fledgling youths, innocently knowing in respect to wines, cigars, and horses, and more easily to be made a prey by flattered vanity than any village greenhorn in his ignorance.

It would be a libel to say that there were not good fellows in this curious crowd. There were certain sturdy men of the world who dreamt of robbing nobody, and who would certainly have puzzled the astutest member of the gang to rob them. There were honest harumscarum good-hearted lads, who were learning the A B C of the world in that singular seminary, and paying more than they thought of for the tuition they received.

Amongst these was one Harry Wynne, who was great-grandson to no less a person than the noble founder of the club. The Earl of Bridgebourne had got into the nineties by this time, and the Five-Year-Old

Club was about a dozen years of age. The earl had completely withdrawn himself from it years ago, and to his uninstructed fancy it was as respectable, as stately, and as dull as it had been in his own day. The old nobleman naturally went but little into the world, but he kept all his faculties sharp and clear, was extremely proud of the youthfulness of his aspect—he looked not a day over five hundred—and the uncertain activity of his venerable legs. He was a very stately old gentleman indeed, but the pride of youth carried him so far that on coming down to breakfast of a morning he would not disdain to execute a little dancing step or two before his familiars, displaying his youthful vigour and agility with a mirth which grinned the saddest memento mori.

The earl was aware of his great-grandson's membership of the club, and at least on one occasion splendidly congratulated him on the precocious good sense which led him to choose the society of his elders and his betters. The young man perfectly understood the position of affairs, but for his own sake refrained from laughter until he was out of the magnificent old gentleman's presence.

Mr. Harry Wynne, whose fortunes this history proposes to follow, had barely achieved his majority. He stood six feet in his socks, and though at present a shade too thin for his height, gave promise of developing into a rather unusually handsome fellow. He wore his fair hair closely cropped, and had a little golden down upon his upper lip. He had a good, frank pair of grey eyes of his own, well set apart, was gifted by nature with high spirits, and a not inconsiderable share of

mother wit, and was altogether a very favourable specimen of the British adolescent, so far as aspect and manners are concerned. He had no profession, and not a great deal of money, and he had been bred in a bad-dish school. Eton and Cambridge had between them succeeded in inoculating the boy with the notion that debt was the normal condition of a gentleman. Without being in the faintest degree intentionally dishonest, he had learned that so long as a man nursed the intent to pay mere tradespeople their debts, the time of payment stood for next to nothing. In fact, the villainous system of credit, as practised with young men of good families at our public schools and universities, had got into the lad's bones. He had been in debt when he was eight years of age, and had lived on credit ever since, paying away his hypothecated little income cheerfully enough when it came to him, and walking daily deeper and deeper into the mire, in the serene certainty that there was sound land ahead of him.

He got a thousand or two when he came of age, but it was mortgaged years ago, and he saw next to nothing of it. If he had only known it he had come long since to the end of his tether, but happily or unhappily the tether of youth is elastic, and young Wynne was disposed to stretch his to the utmost. If he had been in a hurry to go to the Mischief he could hardly have chosen a better starting point than the Five-Year-Old Club. Play began there every night pretty soon after dinner, was in full swing at midnight, and went on until all hours in the morning. At two o'clock the club was poetically supposed to close, and from players who desired to continue their game

the proprietor exacted a fine of five pounds for the first hour, ten for the second, fifteen for the third, and so on. Captain Peter Heaton found this system work admirably, for the nightly fines alone gave him an annual income of some nine or ten thousand pounds.

Whenever young Wynne got money he played, and, as a pretty regular thing, he lost, as anybody might have expected and predicted. In spite of his long apprenticeship to debt and the gay carelessness natural to youth, he began to tremble a little at his own prospects. There was nothing for it but to play higher, and he played higher and plunged deeper accordingly, until one melancholy wet autumn morning he walked home to his lodging in Duke Street, St. James's, with an utterly bankrupt exchequer, and a gambling debt of three hundred and fifty pounds on his shoulders. He had to own to himself that things looked as bad as they well could look. His only hope of raising money was by play, and yet until he had paid play was forbidden. He got wretchedly to sleep and won vast sums which profited him nothing on awaking.

His great-uncle, Lord Hounes, the Earl of Bridgebourne's eldest son, was in town, and the boy made a despairing, useless call on him. Lord Hounes had borne his courtesy title for seven-and-sixty years, and had long since felt weary and ill-used under it. He had never entertained any great affection for the earl, and what little he had had been quenched this score of years by his father's unheard of and selfish persistence in living. For his station he had been hard up all his life, and the old earl had always

steadfastly refused to help him. His lordship lived in Eccleston Square, and having reached his door and rung the bell, the boy stood staring at the iron pine-apple at the corner of the area railings, knowing in his heart that he might as well present his petition to it as to his poor and parsimonious great-uncle.

Lord Hounes gave him a sour lecture and a heap of antiquated advice, but beyond these declined to give him anything. The young man went away sorrowful, and carried his hopeless petition to his uncle, Colonel Percy Seaforth.

Colonel Seaforth was a very different person from Lord Hounes, and the lad knew well enough that the one difficulty to be dreaded here was poverty rather than parsimony. Young Wynne was an orphan, and, his own limited resources once exhausted, had no help to look for anywhere in the world but at Uncle Percy's hands. Uncle Percy had a younger brother's income and his pay, and if out of this he allowed his nephew three hundred and fifty a year, he certainly did a good deal more than his cold duty by him. The boy knew that well enough, and felt an added weight of shame as he thought of his uncle's unfailing generosity.

The colonel was at home, and heard his story through with a sorrowful patience, tugging at his grey moustache as he listened.

"Well, Harry, my lad," he said, by way of answer, "you seem to be in a very considerable scrape, and you have nobody but yourself to thank for it. You are my only sister's only son, and I have done

what I could for you for your mother's sake. It does not become me to talk about it, but I have done a little more than my duty, and if I say that I can't do any more, it is simply because I can't, and not because I won't. The allowance will go on, but I can't give you that before quarter-day, because I sha'n't have it at the bank till then."

Colonel Seaforth was a bit of a Don Quixote to look at, a tired and melancholy gentleman who had been overlooked in his profession, and had been saddened, though not soured, by ill fortune. He had a kindly heart, as he had constantly proved to his nephew, and if the young scapegrace had found courage to tell him everything, he would have made an effort to assist him. But the lad, as lads in trouble will, had disguised half his difficulties, and without meaning to be dishonest, had put altogether too favourable a complexion on the general aspect of affairs.

He went away unhelped, and wandered home, and from here, after a wretched hour or two, wandered, out of sheer vacuity, to the club. The class of men who used the Five-Year-Old in the daytime and the class of men who made it their haunt by night had certain widely-marked differences between them. The daylight contingent was eminently respectable. Its talk was of horses to be sure, but they talked horse with as much seriousness as men of business talk of notes of exchange or politicians of the events of the session. They were racing gentlemen—owners of stables and the like, and followed the pleasure of their life with perfect

sobriety and discretion. The names of many of them were known and respected on every racecourse in the kingdom, and they enjoyed a fame which within its limits was as complete as that of Prince Bismarck or Mr. Gladstone. Outside the strange world which lives by and for horses they might be unknown, but within it they were potentates and powers.

Captain Peter Heaton, the club proprietor, was as much at home with the one set as the other. An affable smiling man of a trifle over the middle height and a trifle over middle age, iron-grey about the whiskers, perfectly polished in manner, and in full command of face and temper. He was as keen as a razor and shaved as closely, as a score or two of people who had learned him well could tell you.

The gallant captain was seated in his customary armchair in the club smoking-room, reading the day's racing quotations, and solacing himself with an excellent cigar and a glass of fine old Bourbon judiciously tempered with *apollinaris* water. Young Wynne dropped into a seat beside him, and nodded rather gloomily in answer to the captain's cheerful and cordial salutation. Heaton, from behind his newspaper, cast a glance at the lad and diagnosed his symptoms instantly. There was a buzz of conversation going on in the room, and when the captain dropped his newspaper and edged with a friendly, confidential manner towards the broken young gentleman there was no danger of their speech being overheard.

"You were pretty hard hit last night, weren't you?" the captain asked. His manner was sympathetic, and the boy was ready to be sympathized with. Sympathy was likely to do him little good, and yet he felt he needed it.

"I was, by Jove," he answered. He did his courageous best to look as if it did not matter, but he knew the attempt was a failure.

"Well, you know," said Captain Heaton, with the air of a man of the world, "you really should not play. I don't say you are a bad hand at *écarté* for your years, but it goes without saying that you are no match for a man like Hump or Lanky."

It was one of the delightful peculiarities of the Five-Year-Old that almost everybody in it was decorated with some absurd nickname or other. An ill-tempered critic might be disposed to say that no man who priced his self-respect very high would accept a ridiculous title for himself or assist in conferring it upon another. But perhaps self-respect was not the strong point of the members of the Five-Year-Old, and certainly they were no great sticklers for dignity. They were mostly jaded men, and had a certain palled sense of humour, and if they vented it in that way, they possibly amused themselves and each other, and outsiders got no harm by it.

The gentleman known as Hump was Mr. Herbert Whale, once a city "financier," and now a bookmaker. He was Captain Peter Heaton's jackal, and did his dirty work for him. He had the social polish of a pot-boy, played an excellent amateur game at

billiards, a more than excellent amateur game at écarté, was an average good pigeon shot, and a fair bruiser. He was generally regarded as a hard-fisted, honest fellow, and it was known that if he did a friendly service, he wanted a hundred per cent. for it. If the security were shaky he would go as far as two hundred per cent. to oblige you, and he had command of apparently unlimited sums for investment.

Lanky was Captain Charles Bolder, a person related to one of the noblest families in the kingdom, and a gentleman against whose character nothing had ever been established. He had held a commission in the Blues, and knew every fast man and fast woman in town. He knew a prodigious number of people outside those dubious circles, and was as much at home in the monde as in the demi-monde. He was a very useful man in getting an aristocratic list of stewards for semi-theatrical balls, or for finding respectable names for the committees of sporting clubs. His luck at cards was known to be peculiar, and nobody turned up the king at écarté or the nine at baccarat so often as he. If anybody else had imitated him in these achievements it would have been remarked upon.

"Why shouldn't I be a match for either of them?" asked the benighted youth, in answer to the captain's statement. "A man can't play against luck, but if I held such cards as Lanky had last night, don't you think I could have beaten him? Of course I could."

"My dear boy," said the captain, "luck levels

itself, and everybody gets his slice of it if he can stay long enough. But it's knowing what to do with it when you've got it."

"Let me have a slice of it," said Mr. Wynne, not boastfully, but with a resigned despair, "and I'll show you what I'll do with it." He lowered his voice and leaned closer to the captain. "Upon my soul," he said, "I'm very horribly cornered, Heaton. I don't a bit know what to do."

"Don't talk about it here," the captain responded; "drop into my room and I'll join you there directly."

A gleam of hope shot into the lad's mind, and he looked at Heaton gratefully.

He rose from his place and lounged guardedly out of the room, and a minute later he and the captain were closeted together.

"How much is it, Wynne?"

"It's three hundred and fifty."

"Did you drop all that last night?"

"Yes, and a couple of ponies ready beside."

"Whom do you owe it to?" He knew all about it already.

"To tell you the truth," said young Wynne shamefacedly, "I borrowed the chips from the cashier. I gave him my word of honour that I would pay him to-morrow."

"Begad," said the captain, "that's worse than I thought. That's very rough indeed, Wynne. You've been to your own people?"

"I went to old Hounes this morning, but he's as stingy as he knows how to be. He won't part

with a cent. I've just come away from Colonel Seaforth's. He's as good as the bank, poor old chap, if he'd got it, but I've had a lot out of him already, and he told me plain and straight that he couldn't do it. It's no use going to Bridgebourne. I know I'm down for something there, but if I told him how I stood he wouldn't leave me a shilling."

In naming his relatives he was not altogether without a hope that they might have some little influence upon the captain's mind, but the captain only whistled dolefully at the conclusion of his recital, and lifted his eyebrows with an air which seemed to say that the thing was practically done with.

"Do you think you could help me, Heaton?" the lad asked desperately "Do you? There's a good fellow!"

"My dear boy," said Heaton, "if I could I wouldn't. I'm a poor man, as you know"—the intending borrower knew nothing of the sort, and shrewdly suspected the contrary—"and besides that I've been compelled to make a vow never to lend money in the club. I lose my members and I lose my friends. You see I'm candid with you, but it makes no difference. If I wished it ever so much I couldn't do it. And I've been horribly hard hit myself lately. But"—his countenance was as suddenly irradiated by this inspiration as if he had not led up to it from the beginning—"why don't you go to Hump? He does a little in that way I know. He may make you pay for it, for he's a bit hard-fisted, but he's a good sort at bottom,

and if you can show him anything for it I've no doubt he'll do it."

Any port in a storm. The boy hailed in his heart, this promise of deliverance and crowded on all sail to reach it. The friendly Hump was at that moment in the club, and being sent for appeared without delay. Captain Heaton left the pigeon and the rook together, and in half an hour the business was arranged. At the end of the negotiations Mr. Herbert Whale had parted with his cheque for four hundred pounds, and had undertaken to send to the borrower's house fifty pounds worth of champagne of a brand as yet unknown, which was guaranteed to beat anything in the market when once it got there, and a half case of cigars, also priced at fifty pounds, and of a quality in both senses unheard of. In return for this young Wynne had accepted a bill at three months for eight hundred and fifty pounds. Hump had been merciful, and had charged him less than four hundred per cent. per annum

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Master Harry found time to think about things he began to see that the helpful Hump had been less generous than he had at the first blush appeared. That the champagne turned out to be utterly abominable, and that the cigars were worth something like a quarter of their professed value, may have helped the process of enlightenment. Even without their aid he could see that to pay eight hundred and fifty pounds for a loan of five hundred for three months was to buy a temporary relief rather dearly. He found that to fill one hole he had dug a larger, and being in the main a reasonable young fellow, he took the matter seriously to heart and cast about in his own mind and in the world at large for means whereby he might amend at once his ways and his financial position.

He had a little surface classical learning and a pretty knack of turning verses. He had actually been already in print, and readers of one of the society journals knew to whom to attribute certain

elegant lines addressed to Inthia, and signed H. W. He had a sort of vague notion that literature was one of the ways to wealth, an idea which says something for the sanguine turn of his mind and for his inexperience.

He was on fairly intimate terms with the editor of the journal in question, and before his financial arrangement with Mr. Whale was a week old he called at the editorial office with a little bundle of manuscript which he had selected from the trifles of the last half a dozen years. The editor glanced at them, and tossed them lightly about with an apparent sense of their value which was strongly out of proportion with the author's. This one would do perhaps, and perhaps this other; as for the rest—well, he would look them over. He might find a corner for them. The budding *littérateur* suggested payment, said something in a vague and general way about the necessity of buckling to at one thing or another, and expressed his resolution to abide by the *belles-lettres*, for which he was modestly convinced that he had a native aptitude.

In effect he and the editor did come to actual terms, and the young gentleman found himself engaged on approbation to produce prose and verse on society topics, and to supply paragraphs from his own personal knowledge of society people at a rate of remuneration which might rise to five pounds per week or sink to three. Obviously there was no Eldorado here, but for all that it was better than nothing, and Harry felt

a glow of conscious rectitude as he emerged upon the street.

He cut the club almost entirely, and he slaved away at his verses, his piquant little society paragraphs, and his occasional small type articles, under the natural and excusable impression that he was bringing about something like a new era in letters, and had at least set his foot on the first rung of the golden ladder.

When this had been going on for about a month he encountered Captain Peter Heaton, who hailed him cordially and dropped the friendliest possible little reminder about Hump's bill. Captain Heaton was sorry to tell the young fellow that Hump had been very hard hit, and would be certain to want his money up to time. This was a new awakener, for Harry had allowed himself to hope almost with certainty that the bill could be renewed, and had indeed staved off in fancy its final payment to some indefinite distant period when money would be comparatively a matter of indifference to him.

Being thus enforced to look still more widely afield for ways and means, he called to mind a certain C. W. Fergusson, a contractor in a great way of business, and a member of Parliament whom he had met at the house of Lord Hounes. This Fergusson was a Scotchman—a man of energy and probity, who had one foible. He wanted to associate with people of fashion, and would have given anything for a baronetcy. Young Wynne mixed with the best people in England, and when he

came seeking employment in Fergusson's office he got it without demur, and with it a salary of two hundred pounds a year, which was at least a hundred more than he was worth to begin with. All the ways opened themselves to the young man, but none of them led to immediate fortune. He could command now an income of seven hundred pounds a year, and if he lived like an anchorite and worked like a nigger he could hope to pay off Hump's bill in about a year and a half. He went on trusting to the chapter of accidents, and was warmly applauded by elderly friends and relatives, who knew nothing of the motive which pushed him to such promising efforts.

Sometimes, when the weight of the Hump slipped for a moment from his shoulders, he felt wonderfully happy and virtuous. He had plenty of capacities, and had such stores of health and spirits that no amount of work seemed to overtire him. The more he did the better he grew to like it, and he quite wondered that he had ever thought himself at ease in the old idle, vacuous days.

Whilst this new tide of energy and resolve was running he began to think with greater seriousness than ever about the virtues and personal perfections of Miss Inthia Grey. He had known Miss Grey from her childhood, and even in the days of the Eton jacket and collar had regarded her with thoughts of worship. There had been of course an interregnum in his passion, but when the brutal period of adolescence, at which all girls are despicable in a boy's eyes, was over, he had come

back to the original shrine and had performed secret rites of adoration there. It was she who had prompted his muse and had given life to the verses signed H. W. in the society journal to which he was now a recognized contributor. In the boyish efflorescence of his heart he made a great matter of this, and told himself that love had found the way to fame and fortune.

The harder he worked the more he thought of Inthia, and the more he thought of Inthia the more he was inspired to labour.

Of course nobody is expected to share a lover's raptures about his mistress, but making all allowances for loverlike exaggeration, Inthia Grey remains a very charming and beautiful girl. She had at this period of her life a complexion of remarkable purity and brilliance, a colour so rich and fine that it would alone have made her noticeable amongst a crowd of young girls of her age. In addition to this she had the softest, shyest, most speaking and amiable eyes, a figure full of delicate grace and vivacity, and a very jewel of a heart. She was not quite eighteen, but Lady McCorquodale, who was supposed to know her as well as anybody, was wont to say that she had, under all her airs of quiet submission, a character of unusual firmness and tenacity.

Lady McCorquodale was the eldest and only surviving daughter of the Earl of Bridgebourne. Her ladyship had united herself early in life to a young Scottish clergyman whom the family influence had brought to the dignity of lawn-sleeves and a seat in the House of Peers. Miss Grey was a niece

of the late bishop, and her ladyship, who had no children, had adopted the girl in her very earliest childhood as her own.

The whole family had been aware of Master Harry's infatuation for Lady McCorquodale's beautiful little ward, and when they were no more than children together had thought his devotion and her acceptance of it a very pretty sight to witness, as no doubt it was. As the young people grew up towards manhood and womanhood the case had begun to assume a graver air. There had been one or two informal family councils, at which the position of affairs had been discussed. It was admitted that if anything should come of the evident preference the young people showed for each other the advantages were all on Inthia's side. Lady McCorquodale made no secret of the fact that she meant to leave her money to the girl. The late bishop had been a saving man, and outside the publicly-announced benefactions enforced by his position had spent next to nothing of his income. Inthia would be well-to-do, and Harry, except for the limited fortune his Uncle Percy would leave him, would have nothing. It would be a brilliant match for the boy therefore, and by no means a brilliant match for the girl. Still the whole thing was in the family, and there was no objection made by the responsible people on either side.

As the time approached for the payment of the bill Harry discovered that he could by no means hope to provide more than a hundred pounds towards meeting it, but he made himself fairly easy

about it after the manner of youth, under the belief that the holder would renew. He hardly went near the club, but he had casual meetings with his old friends of the Five-Year-Old, and learned to his great rejoicing that Hump had been in extraordinary vein of late, and had been raking in money by the handful. He had no particular affection for Hump, and only rejoiced in that personage's good luck because it seemed likely to be serviceable to himself. He thought that a creditor with his pockets full of money would be pleasanter to deal with than one whose pockets were empty—which again may be accepted as a proof of the young man's ignorance of the world.

But when the day of settling approached, and Harry Wynne met Mr. Whale by appointment he encountered an unexpected blow in the first sentence that was spoken.

"I was afraid," said Whale, who was a mournfully confidential man with a high falsetto voice and a habit of boring an interlocutor into corners, "I was afraid that you weren't going to turn up, and I'm so rotten poor that upon my word I don't know where to look for a fiver."

This staggered the debtor for a moment.

"I am horribly sorry to hear it, old fellow, but——"

"For heaven's sake," said the plaintive Whale, "don't tell me you're not going to do it. I've got nine hundred to find to-morrow, and I don't know more than the man in the moon where to look for the other fifty."

"I thought you'd been winning all over the shop," young Wynne answered feebly. "I haven't been about the club much lately, but when I have met any of the fellows I've heard of nothing but your luck."

"You haven't heard much of my luck," piped Whale, "for this last three weeks, or if you have I haven't I'm stone-broke, my boy, and that's all about it. I've got to pay Hoskins of Cork Street nine hundred to-morrow, and if you can't meet the bill I must hand it over to him to-morrow. *You* know what sort of a fellow *he* is."

Harry was perfectly ignorant of the reputation enjoyed by Mr. Hoskins, but there was so serious a foreboding in Mr. Whale's tone that his heart quailed at him.

"What can he do?" he asked.

"Do?" said Whale, in his anguished falsetto; "he can't do much. He can only run us both into the bankruptcy court, and that means ruin—to me, anyhow. I don't know how your people might take it."

At this point, with an aspect of resigned despair, he sipped at a brandy and soda, bit off the end of a cigar with a sudden malicious spiteful jerkiness, and having apparently forgotten to light it, plunged himself moodily into an arm-chair, and did his best to look wretched and disconsolate.

The pigeon had no need to assume any of the airs the rook was acting. He felt quite overwhelmed by this unexpected turn of affairs.

"Look here, Hump," he said in hopeless apology,

"I've got a hundred, and if you can stave the thing off for another three months you're welcome to it. I'm awfully sorry, old man," he added, with unnecessary contrition. "If I had thought I was putting you into a hole I would never have borrowed the money. I'm earning money now, and I shall earn more as I go on, and if I could only have a year or two to turn round in I could pay it all without bothering anybody."

"My dear boy," Whale responded, with a voice and air of profound wretchedness, "if they'd only give me a month I'm as safe as the bank. But old Hoskins is worse than a Jew; he'll have his pound of flesh to-morrow, and he'll take it off both of us, and that's all about it."

This was a sufficiently unpleasant prospect, and Harry sat in silence to contemplate it. He glanced now and again at Whale, who preserved throughout a very creditable assumption of despair. Nothing was said between them for perhaps five minutes, when the rook suddenly leaned over and laid a hand upon his companion's shoulder. The youngster, looking up seemed to read a gleam of hope in his eyes.

"I've got an idea, my boy. I think we can work it. Your credit's pretty good, isn't it? You don't owe much?"

"I don't owe a hundred, outside this," young Wynne answered. "I paid off two or three thousand nine months ago, and I've been going pretty steady since."

"Then we *can* do it," cried Whale, slapping him

on the shoulder with a beaming smile. "Butterfield will do it for us."

"Butterfield?"

"Yes, Butterfield. Conduit Street. Jeweller."

"What will he do?"

"He'll let a fellow in your position have a bracelet or two, or something of that sort. You needn't tell him what you want 'em for. He'll simply think it's for some girl or other. Attenborough will do the rest."

As before, any port in a storm; but this particular entrance looked perilous, and the mariner was afraid of it for a while.

"Butterfield won't bother you for a couple of years," and at that assurance all sense of danger vanished. "You'll have to get seventeen or eighteen hundred pounds' worth," and at that the victim winced a little. "It won't make any difference, my boy. You can pay interest on it at your uncle's until you redeem it, and then Butterfield will take it back again, and only charge you a commission for it."

"He doesn't know anything about me," said Wynne.

"Oh yes, he does, my boy. You trust Butterfield. Your name's in Debrett—that's good enough for him."

Master Wynne jumped into a cab, and drove straight to the jeweller's. Mr. Butterfield was the pink of courtesy, and apparently had no suspicion in his nature. He held a pair of white hands up to his chin and smoothed them one over the other with a constant caressing motion, expressive of a

fluttered deference. Mr. Butterfield had never before had the extreme honour of dealing with a member of the Bridgebourne family. He was delighted to secure Mr. Wynne's custom, and trusted so to satisfy him by their first transaction, as to secure his constant patronage, and, he hoped, the patronage of the family. What did Mr. Wynne desire? A bracelet? Or a rivière, or both? The moment was curiously opportune. He had just that moment received from his principal workman a perfect little object of art. It could be worn as a bracelet, as a brooch, as an ornament for the hair, or as a centrepiece for the rivière which accompanied it. The stones were Brazilian, and of the purest water—not the rubbish nowadays imported from the Cape. Mr. Butterfield produced the glittering little object in its morocco case with a lining of sapphire-coloured velvet and white satin. Mr. Wynne could observe its extreme neatness, its—its chastity. The price of this charming little object was, it turned out, phenomenal for cheapness. It was only two thousand three hundred pounds, and Mr. Butterfield declared with fervour that no other jeweller in the West End was in a position to offer such an article for less than three thousand.

Mr. Wynne, nervously caressing his incipient moustache, thought it would serve his purpose admirably. Mr. Butterfield rubbed his hands the more at this, and with a confidential certainty into which a little air of the most refined and respectful jocularitv was allowed to creep, ventured to think that the lady would approve of it.

An hour later the trinket was in the hands of Mr. Attenborough, and the dreaded bill was in ashes in the fire-grate of Harry Wynne's chambers.

Still an hour later Captain Peter Heaton and Mr. Herbert Whale sat in Mr. Butterfield's private room over a glass of singularly fine old Madeira, and amicably arranged the share which should fall to each of them when Mr. Wynne's family should have been compelled to pay for his purchase.

CHAPTER III.

IT was two o'clock on the Saturday preceding the Christmas week, and Mr. Fergusson, who was already gloved, great-coated, and ready to depart, had sent a message to Mr. Wynne, requesting a moment's interview.

"I never had a gentleman under my orders until now," said the great contractor, "and when I first engaged ye, Mr. Wynne, I confess that I had a certain misgiving in regard to the enterprise. I've sent for ye to tell ye that I'm very much pleased indeed with your assiduity and your business intelligence. The hill of commercial prosperity, Mr. Wynne, is difficult to climb, and no man can do it by spurts. I'm a pretty quick obsairver, and I'm inclined to think that ye have the root of the matter in ye. I sent for ye on purpose to tell ye of my satisfaction, and as a sign of it ye'll find your salary raised next year to the extent of twelve pounds ten per quarter. Now to a young gentleman of your up-bringing that sum may appear very

insignificant, but you may regard it as the first indication of successful merit. I wish ye a merry Christmas, Mr. Wynne, and a happy new year."

The increase in itself was not magnificent, but it was an earnest of future things, and the kind words which went with it warmed the young fellow's heart. He climbed on to a westward omnibus, and took a certain hardy pride in facing the weather in that economic fashion. He had a fortnight's holiday before him, and gave idleness the first welcome he had ever offered it in his life, having learned its sweets from labour. All his journalistic work was ready beforehand, and his portmanteaux were already packed for a visit to Lady McCorquodale's house at Norwood, where he would encounter the divine and perfect Inthia. He had come to that loverlike stage by this time in which a young man discovers that he is absolutely unworthy of the regard of the girl he cares for, and when his knowledge of her affection fills him with a profound humility and disposes him to high resolve. The routine of the office was glorified by the thought of her, and when he lashed vice or exalted virtue in his weekly article or his prettily turned verses, Inthia was always with him, and the thought of her, to his own mind, inspired him to an excellence he could never have achieved without her.

Romance is not of much use to a young man of limited income, unless it lead him amongst other things to the study of figures. It had led him in that direction, and he had drawn up a creditably business-like balance-sheet by means of which he

saw himself and the world no more than a thousand pounds at variance. He would pay interest on the jewels until such time as he could redeem them, and would then be able to return them to Mr. Butterfield at a sacrifice of perhaps a couple of hundred pounds. His income was increasing—he had withdrawn his expenditure to the narrowest limits; he was working for love's sake, and felt as if there were no end to energy or success, and in two years at the least he would be clear. He felt mightily experienced at this time, and realized, as he thought, quite clearly, the price he had paid for his whistle. He had had his lesson, so he told himself, and had paid for it, and sometimes, though he was not often of a devotional turn, he thanked providence devoutly for having opened his eyes so early. He was young, and the world lay before him to conquer and subdue. There was not a lad in London whose heart beat to a more honestly exultant tune than his that grimy afternoon.

The hansom was already at the door to carry him and his belongings to Victoria, and he was actually upon the threshold when the postman brought him a letter which completed his beatitude. It came from the editor of a popular magazine, announced that the article he had sent in a week or two before was accepted, and contained the welcome intelligence that it would be paid for. There are writers who receive more than the half-guinea a page offered for Harry Wynne's first contribution to the magazines, but they are veterans or specialists, and no more get flushed with joy over their earnings than

a provision dealer over the profits on the sale of bacon. The budding author felt his cheeks flush and his eye kindle as he read. He was lord of himself and of the world.

With this happy exaltation scarcely subdued he reached his journey's end. Lady McCorquodale actually came into the entrance-hall to receive him, an act of cordiality and condescension that imposing and stately woman had never before permitted herself. Lady McCorquodale was of majestic proportions, and strictly clerical in her dress and demeanour, as befitted the relict of a bishop. The sainted doctor had had a severe time of it in his day, and her ladyship had ruled him by the power of the house of Bridgebourne as with a rod of iron. He had been a man of comparatively humble extraction, and had never overgrown the Scottish pragmatical humility which had distinguished him in his earlier days. A kind of wonder sat upon the good man's soul to find himself the son-in-law of a peer, and legislating under the same gilded roof with him for the benefit of common people. Lady McCorquodale had taken good care of that amazement, and had always kept it alive and flourishing. Now that the good doctor had escaped her rule he had grown to be a king and a saint among men in her remembrance. His portrait decorated almost every apartment in the house, smiling with a sour, thin logical look from the family canvas, the photographic paper, and in the servants' bed-rooms from the framed front pages of illustrated evangelical weeklies, where the impress of the sainted coun-

tenance was dented by the uneven type of the hidden page.

Lady McCorquodale was ten years younger than her brother Lord Hounes, and was therefore at this time fifty-seven years of age. She carried the muscle of the family, and at one time had had some pretensions to beauty, though these had long since worn away. She always wore her widow's weeds, and what with a natively imperious temperament and a long life of government, had developed a gait and bearing like those of a permanently indignant queen. When she was gracious she was all the more agreeable by contrast, but her amiabilities were rare, and her servants in especial lived in dread of her chill and dignified asperities.

Whilst her ladyship was greeting her great-nephew in the hall an apparition presented itself upon the staircase and drew his eyes and attention that way. Inthia stood smiling at him from the stairway, looking sweetly pretty in a plain dress of Scotch gray tweed. She advanced after a pause of a second or two, and gave him her hand with a pretty blush. The boy's eyes looked adoration at her, and as the little warm hand nestled in his own for a mere instant he thrilled all over, and was ready to slay dragons. Even her stern ladyship smiled, well pleased at their meeting, and indeed the person would have been hard to please who would not have looked on the young pair with satisfaction. The lad, with his close-cropped gold head, brave forehead, and candid eyes, and his tall slim figure with its promise of manly strength, and the girl,

mignonne and graceful, with her steadfast look and changeful colour, made a charming picture.

The two young people said little, but they looked a great deal, and when Harry had superintended the unpacking of his belongings he sought the drawing-room, and charmed all ears by a modest recital of his successes. Lady McCorquodale was proud of him, but was not overmuch disposed to show it.

"In my time," she said, with dignity, "gentlemen were not supposed to enter into commerce or letters or that kind of thing. But in these democratic days things are different. We cannot change the times, and I suppose we must go with them like other people. I trust that I shall always speak of papa with the respect which befits his position and his age, but if I occupied his place I would take care that my descendants, at least during my lifetime, were not obliged to derogate from their own proper place in the world."

Inthia was of a different opinion, and for this three months past had accustomed herself to think nobly of commerce. As for her lover's turn for verses, she compared it to Winthrop Mackworth Praed's, which was more than the general public did, and even thought it if anything a little superior. He was, altogether a hero in her eyes, and that he should scorn delight and live laborious days made him of course more noble than ever. She glowed over the editor who had accepted the young gentleman's first magazine article, and thought him the most discerning of men.

The dinner and the evening passed as dinners

and evenings usually pass. The next day was lovely. There had been a fall of snow during the night. The wind blew keen and bracing from the north, and the sun shone brightly with a reddish tinge, as if his face were blown into light and colour by that exhilarating air. The young lovers walked to church together, leaving her ladyship to drive thither with the late bishop's sister, Mrs. Brotherick, and that lady's daughters, the Misses Arabella and Julia.

Perhaps the whole of their contemplations were not directed towards the service, and perhaps even the periods of the rosy-cheeked curate, delightfully intoned as they were, failed to enlist their complete attention. Pleasanter than the rosy-cheeked curate's periods to the ears of the whole congregation Inthia's voice sounded in the musical service of the morning. And if the whole congregation found those fresh, clear, and natural notes pleasant to listen to, it may be taken for granted that her lover found them at least as agreeable as any other listener. The girl had no more thought of singing for show than the robin-redbreast who, excited by the music within the building, perched himself on a tombstone outside and carolled in the intervals of the service; but simply and quietly as she sang, the notes were so pure and true that they made their way through the general clamour of choir and congregation with as little effort as a beam of light shows when it throws a shaft across the darkness. Harry looked at her and thought of Saint Cecilia and of Reynolds's lovely picture of Miss Linley,

to which indeed she bore some resemblance. If it is heathen in a young gentleman of two or three and twenty to kneel in spirit at love's shrine in a Christian church, it is to be feared that there are many cultured young heathens in the world, and perhaps after all a young man may be worse occupied even in church than in making honest and manly vows to himself in behalf of the tender and delicate creature whom he means, if he can, to marry. This was certainly Harry's chief spiritual employment for the time being, and by the time the service was over he was in as proper a state of self-abasement and good resolve as if every one of the rosy curate's moral shafts had found a target in his bosom.

Lady McCorquodale sailed majestically down the aisle when the service was over, followed in a meeker reflected glory by Mrs. Brotherick and the Misses Arabella and Julia. Harry and his sweetheart lingered behind a little, to give them time to drive away. The slide of the box in which the pew library was kept was opportunely obstinate, and would not close until they had stooped over it for quite a long time, with heads and hands in near neighbourhood. The beneficent obstacle yielded when it had served its turn, and the young people were free to walk home together alone and undisturbed. The curate, who at the bottom of his heart had no love for the practice of oratory, had been merciful to himself, and had preached as short a sermon as he dared, so that the lovers had a clear three-quarters of an hour to luncheon, and

could walk by a circuitous and countrified route that fine morning.

They had not much to say to each other, and the few sentences they spoke were uttered by fits and starts. The pretty little girl in her furs and the tall lad in his ulster looked peculiarly demure, and to the unintelligent eye gave no sign of their inward condition. In their hearts they were perfectly certain of each other, and yet they were full of those tender, plaguing, and delightful doubts with which love is familiar. They were sorely in want of a neutral theme to talk about, and by and by they found one. A remarkably Christmassy old gentleman, with trimmed mutton-chop whiskers of a snowy whiteness, a face of florid red with good living, stout health, and winter weather, and a figure and attire strongly reminiscent of the John Bull of Mr. Tenniel, was in the act of bowing to an old lady who paused at the door of her house to respond to his courtesy. The old gentleman's bow was perfectly polite, but had yet a tinge of friendly respectful waggery and burlesque in it, as if in the amiable exuberance of his heart he rather overdid it. He had just re-covered his shining old head with his broad-brimmed old-fashioned hat, when he turned, and, catching sight of Inthia, bowed again.

"Good morning, my dear," said the old gentleman, with a chuckle in his voice. "You sang charmingly in church this morning. It is a great treat to hear a fine voice in devotional music. I had a voice myself once on a time, but that was long ago."

Harry supposed naturally that this hearty old personage was known to his companion, and stood smilingly to listen to his compliments. The old gentleman, quite sans gêne, took from Inthia's hands the book she carried, and fluttered over the pages of Hymns Ancient and Modern until he found a certain page, when, with a stout, gloved forefinger following the notes, he began to hum the tune they indicated in a quaint, quavering old tenor, which had yet a husky mellowness in it.

"Fine tune, Old Boston," said the old gentleman. "Many fine tunes here, and I am sure, my dear, that you sing them all delightfully. I wish it were my privilege to hear you. Good morning, my dear, and forgive an old gentleman for complimenting you."

With that the old gentleman gave another sweeping bow with the old-fashioned hat, and walked away radiant, having returned the book to Inthia's hand still open at the page to which he had referred.

"Who is he?" Harry asked, when he had gone out of hearing.

"I don't know him," Inthia responded, her dark eyes dancing with fun, "but he is a very delightful old gentleman."

They laughed happily together, and walked on with their late uneasiness banished from their minds.

"He's an excellent critic," said Harry. "We must allow him that much, at least. What does he call the tune he was humming?"

He bent his head to look at the page, and Inthia

held it open before him in her two little gloved hands. They were quite alone upon the road, for they had naturally chosen the least frequented way and Harry essayed, in imitation of the vanished eccentric, to hum the tune before him. He sang like a raven, and horribly out of time.

"No, no," said Inthia, "this is how it goes," and she hummed it slowly, following the notes with her finger as the old gentleman had done a minute or two earlier. "Look," she said; "where the note stands higher than the one before it the voice rises. That is not a very profound lesson in music, but it is true."

She hummed the air once more, pensively and softly, still tracing the notes with her fore finger. The little nail was clearly defined beneath the glove, and the boy traced its outline with the absurdest delightful emotion. He bent down closer and closer, doubtless moved by a desire to master the intricacies of the tune. There was nobody in sight, and the friendly solitude of the fields was all about them. There were high hedges on either side, their bare curves festooned with snow, and glittering in the sunlight like fairy silver. It was uncomfortable to look sideways, and he dropped a half pace behind, so that from his superior height he could look easily over her shoulder. She, to give him a clear view, inclined her head a little to the right, and so gave him a glimpse of her rosy white neck, with a stray tiny curl or two enhancing its fairness by contrast. The young gentleman forgot the tune, so slight a thing will divert the youthful mind from study,

but the girl went on pensively humming it. Then, whether it were the delightful finger that still followed the notes, or the pretty round neck with the black ringlets curling upon it, or the tune of Old Boston, so sweetly murmured, or all these together, the young man's arm went suddenly but softly round the girl's waist, and the grave, quiet music stopped in the middle. Their feet stood still together on the snow-covered road, and the boy stole his left hand round her until it reached her left shoulder. Then he drew her gently round, and stooped, to look into her drooping face.

"Inthia, my darling! My dear, dear Inthia."

And that, so far as we have a right to inquire, was the whole of the business.

The winter day had been radiant enough before, but the fresh, bright wind might have blown as balmy as in the summer time, and they have known no difference. The glorious winter sunlight dazzled on the fields, and lit every spray of the hedges and every stark wayside weed with a sort of splendour. They walked in fairyland. We have all been there at one time or another, but no man, or woman either, finds an abiding city there. The moments we spent in that enchanted region were brief, but how sweet they were memory knows.

The young people were late for luncheon, and to be late for anything in which she herself was concerned was as a rule among the unforgivable sins in Lady McCorquodale's eyes. But for once she was disposed to be gracious, and the wonderfully bright, glad countenances of the culprits may have

had something to do with the softening of her ladyship's martinet disposition. The presence of a visitor would alone have restrained her from any overt expression of insulted majesty, and as it happened a visitor was present.

Mr. Humphrey Frost was the head of one of the oldest untitled families in Great Britain, and was as solidly proud of being a commoner as he could have been if his forebears had been decorated with every title royalty can bestow. The Bridgebournes were of an old house, but the roots of the Frost family tree went deep into English soil, and the first bearers of the name of whom history held record were solid franklins in Saxon England generations before the rough-and-tumble bands of the Bastard's adventurers found fortunes and titles there. Mr. Frost was not only of a very ancient family, but he was, as the representatives of ancient families sometimes are not, prodigiously wealthy. The railway had made towns of his broad fields, and in doing so had made him a millionaire twice or thrice over. He was not a handsome man, and for his thirty years looked a trifle grizzled and old-fashioned, but he had a thoroughly English bonhomie—which by the way is so thoroughly an English quality that there ought to be an English word for it—a smile that illuminated his plain face like sunshine, and a character of sterling, cheerful honesty. In manner he was at once polished and hearty, and there was hardly a man of his time more universally respected. He was a politician, for sheer fault of opportunity to be something more useful, a sound adviser and

fair debater, though not brilliant, or likely, apart from wealth and personal influence, to be of striking use to his party.

In the eyes of the maternal population of these islands Humphrey Frost shone with an almost sacred lustre. There were one or two better possible matches for marriageable daughters, but only one or two. And then Mr. Frost's character was unimpeachable, which was more than could be said for all his compeers. He had kept no occult establishment by the side of silver Thames, maintained no stud and owned no sporting colours. He had always been cheerfully serious, and without being the least little bit of a milksop had led a life curiously pure and free from blame for an unoccupied man who had had the handling of vast sums of money from his youth upwards. In short he was a gentleman of as old a fashion as his name and family, honourable, chaste, and high minded, a standing unconscious reproach to half his compeers.

Mr. Frost had long been the hope and despair of the best families with marriageable daughters on hand, that by this time almost everybody had decided upon him as being intractable, and a born old bachelor. The net had been spread in sight of the bird so often that he had grown exceptionally wary, even for so old a stager as himself. Of all the wiles and stratagems which are held lawful and honourable in the outer courts of Hymen there was probably not one which had not at some time or other been employed upon him, but he had never been entangled by so much as a

feather. The world of matrons desperately resigned itself to let him alone.

Mr. Frost and Lady McCorquodale were friends of long standing, and Mr. Frost's father had been an early patron of the lamented bishop's, having presented him with his first living, so that there was a tie of friendship between the two houses. Outside the magnificent ægis of Lady McCorquodale Mrs. Brotherick was socially an inconsiderable person, and she knew nothing, except at second and third hand, of Frost's impregnability to matrimonial assault. Her motherly bosom fluttered when she learned that he was in the house, and had actually consented to stay to luncheon. Was it—gracious powers!—was it Julia, or was it Arabella whose charms had brought the super-eligible young man hither? She was tremulously courteous to him, and did kotow before him as if she had been an ambassador and he a heathen potentate. Arabella and Julia fluttered their pretty plumage, and with a fine sisterly abnegation each helped the other to the display of her particular charms and virtues. Such an innocent, unsuspecting, dear little nest of marriageable maiden purity they showed that the eligible parti, whose sense of humour in this regard had been cultivated to the finest, smiled inwardly, and had some trouble not to smile outwardly.

The lovers took the ambrosia and nectar of that feast in a charmed silence, and Lady McCorquodale had most of the talking. She disapproved of the rosy curate's doctrinal laxity, and triumphantly crushed him in the theological mill bequeathed to

her by the late bishop, proving triumphantly by extracts from his published discourses the curate's fallacies.

Mr. Frost took this as he took most things, with a serene good humour, and being alone with her ladyship for a moment after luncheon, he startled that excellent woman amazingly by asking for an immediate private interview. Her ladyship at once accorded his request, and left Mrs. Brotherick and the girls to wonder. A strange conflict of doubt and fear raged in those tender bosoms. Lady McCorquodale was the recognized and undeniable head of their house. Was it etiquette that an intending suitor should apply to her rather than to mamma? Mrs. Brotherick humbly knew herself to be far removed from the exalted circles in which Lady McCorquodale had her habitual being. She was ignorant of these nuances, and could only wait in agitated suspense.

Humphrey Frost went straight to his point, as was the way with him.

"Tell me, Lady McCorquodale," he said, "if I am right in supposing that Miss Grey is free to accept an offer of marriage."

CHAPTER IV.

HER ladyship was hit all abroad by this question. She confessed afterwards in narrating the interview that she had never been so amazed in her life before—so transcendently surprised, were her ladyship's own words. Her amazement was so little guarded that she permitted Frost to see it, but she recovered herself, and offered him a counter question.

“May I ask, Mr. Frost, why you put that question to me?”

“I wish to make Miss Grey my wife,” said Mr. Frost, with straightforward simplicity.

Lady McCorquodale had been perfectly sure beforehand that this would be at least the gist of his answer, and yet when it came it seemed almost to take her breath away.

“I was quite unprepared for this,” she said gravely, collecting herself. “You do Inthia a very high honour, but I am really afraid that you come too late.”

“I hope not,” said Frost. He was very solid and purposeful in his manner, and at Lady McCorquodale's

hint of failure his colour changed slightly, but not so slightly that her ladyship failed to observe it. It gave her a proof of his sincerity in the matter, and she saw at once that his feelings were really engaged. She took an immediate championship of his cause, even in the self-same instant in which it exasperated her to think that it was probably hopeless. To think that a woman of her perspicacity had allowed herself to look on at that silly calf-courtship of Harry Wynne's, whilst such a chance as this was ready to present itself! She knew Humphrey Frost well enough to be sure that he had thought long and seriously before speaking, and she had been so blind that she had guessed absolutely nothing.

The proposal gave Inthia a new value in her eyes. In her own stately, condescending fashion she had admired the girl, but Mr. Frost's approval set such a cachet of distinction upon her that an unwilling admiration was extorted in the old lady's mind. It placed Inthia in another air to think that she might be to-morrow the enemy of every marriageable girl in England.

"Humphrey," she said, falling back into the familiarity of twenty years back, "I will do what I can. I had never thought it possible—I had never so much as dreamed of you coming for her. Between ourselves you and I need have no disguises about one thing. There is not a girl in England whose parents would not jump at you. Your money and your family entitle you to that, and you have an excellent character. It is so self-evident that it seems absurd to say it, but if I had had to choose a husband for

Inthia I should have chosen you. But you must know that the whole family has allowed the thing to go on so long, and Inthia has grown so accustomed to regard it as being settled."

"Let me understand you, Lady McCorquodale," said Frost, with a disturbed and puzzled look. "Miss Grey has no suitor?"

"Indeed she has," responded her ladyship, in an almost querulous tone; "she has been as good as engaged all her lifetime to Harry Wynne."

Mr. Frost smiled, and looked at her ladyship. She, in answer to the smile, shook her head in a sort of vigorous despondency, and Frost became immediately serious.

"Young Wynne," he urged, "is barely out of his teens."

"He is turned two and twenty," responded her ladyship, "and really there is no denying that they are devotedly attached to each other. We have made a sort of family pastime of it. It has been a pretty little sort of pastoral comedy, going on under our noses, and we have all permitted it and petted it and encouraged it until I am afraid that it is past changing."

"They are devotedly attached to each other?" said Frost, who had heard nothing beyond that statement. "That should be enough for a man, I suppose." He was bitterly and evidently disappointed, and his simple and quiet manner emphasized that fact to Lady McCorquodale's understanding. "It certainly should be enough for me," he pursued, "if Mr. Wynne and Miss Grey were a little older. I think Mr. Wynne has no especial prospects?"

“His uncle Percy allows him three hundred a year,” her ladyship answered, “and he is engaged with Mr. Fergusson in the city, and between that and his verses and magazine articles he seems to make four or five hundred more.”

Humphrey Frost looked at that statement thoughtfully, and for the moment quite unselfishly. To a man of his wealth the provision looked beggarly.

“Can you think,” he asked, “of throwing away a girl like Miss Grey upon a prospect of that kind?” He was afraid a second later of seeming unworthy of himself. “I beg you to understand me, Lady McCorquodale. I quite feel the difficulties of the position, and I would not for the world do anything which should even seem to force your ward’s inclination. I know that you are so far superior to any sordid consideration in the matter, that I could not enlist you on that side even if I were disposed to try, but this has made itself a serious question with me, and I wish you to understand that I am very much in earnest. I am willing to wait, and I will ask you to do no more than this—lay my proposal before Miss Grey. Let Mr. Wynne know that it has been made, and let Miss Grey herself at the expiration of half a year be the sole arbitress.”

“It is quite possible,” said her ladyship, with a quiet desperation in her voice which indicated that she thought it quite sufficiently impossible. “It is quite possible that Harry may have self-denial and pride, and even affection enough for Inthia to retire. It is of course possible also that Inthia may see the advantages which your proposal offers. But they

are a romantic young pair, Humphrey, and they have been so encouraged and spoiled."

Her ladyship broke off short once more, and was a good deal surprised to find within her elderly heart a sentiment she had not suspected there. Intensely as she desired the match between Humphrey and Inthia, there was a secret ambushed hope, which was really too foolish to be recognised, that the girl would not permit herself to be tempted from her earlier allegiance. Just that little touch of romance lingered in Lady McCorquodale's stately bosom, only of course to be remorselessly smothered.

"You may perhaps do me one favour, Lady McCorquodale," said Frost, after a lengthy pause.

"I will do whatever I can, my dear Humphrey," her ladyship answered, all the more eagerly because of the traitorous womanly touch of romance in her own heart.

"It would be a relief to me if you could lay my proposal before Miss Grey this afternoon. Let her know, if you please, all that I desire for the present, and let me know in what manner she receives it. If she should desire a longer period than six months, or indeed should make any conditions, I accede to them beforehand. Of course," he added, with a valiant smile, "Miss Grey will understand that I shall not be in any way a trouble to her."

Her ladyship and he arose together, and she laying a hand upon his shoulder looked into his face.

"You care very much about this, Humphrey?"

"My dear lady," he answered, smiling and blushing at the same time, "I care about it very much indeed."

"I will see what I can do," she said, and so left him and went in search of Inthia.

That little foolish compunction was in her breast again, and had to be sternly quenched. But her ladyship knew very well that she would have another sort of respect for the wife of poor Harry Wynne than she would have for the brilliant mistress of Humphrey Frost's half-dozen castles and mansions. She would have to be angry with the girl's romanticism if she clung to the poorer man, but at bottom she would have to love and admire her for it. So in a very compound of feelings, none of which her majestic countenance and person suffered to appear, she made for the conservatory, where she knew she was likeliest to find Inthia. Where Inthia was Harry Wynne was pretty sure to be, and the girl never evinced in his absence that marked partiality for the conservatory she displayed at the time of his visits.

They were there sure enough, but at a rather suspicious distance from each other, warned perhaps by Lady McCorquodale's stiff rustling silks and her hardly sylph-like footsteps.

"Harry," she said, breaking ground at once, "will you leave us for half an hour? I have something to say to Inthia."

A strange gloom settled at once on the boy's heart, a premonition of trouble, associated with no fact or person, but not less genuine on that account. He withdrew at once, of course, and without question, and taking his hat went out of doors, and paced moodily up and down the clean-swept drive, with his hands in his pockets, and his hat tilted forward on to the bridge of

his nose. Humphrey Frost, who was doing his four miles an hour on the carpet, cast a chance look out of window and beheld his rival. A touch of momentary shame laid a finger on him. He was using his wealth and position to oust a poor lover, but after all the poor lover was no more than a boy, and he had the common sense of the situation on his side as well as his own passion. What helped him most to shake off shame's clinging finger was the thought of Inthia holding her poor state somewhere in the district of Bloomsbury, buried in a half decent, struggling poverty. He pitied the romantic dream he came to disturb. He had, as perhaps few men in his place would have had, a genuine feeling for it, but he himself was in love, and with mingled egotism and good reason he told himself that at his age love had a much more radical root than it has in the heart of two and twenty. Boys change and forget, and, said Humphrey Frost to himself—

“I have enough to last me my lifetime.”

“Inthia, dear,” said Lady McCorquodale, “I have something to say to you.”

Inthia slid an arm about the elderly lady's waist, and laid her tender cheek against that formidable bosom.

“I have something to say to you, auntie,” she answered.

“I have the greatest news for you,” Lady McCorquodale responded.

“You cannot have such news for me as I have for you,” said Inthia. “Let me tell mine first.”

“Very well, my dear,” said the old lady, with a rather sickly cold sinking of the heart.

She divined the news already, and it made her task

so difficult that for all her ordinary strength and resolution she felt quite helpless.

Inthia put the other arm about the old lady's waist, and clasped both hands behind her, bending her head so as to hide her eyes, which she knew to be sleepily heavy with the hot blush that mantled on her face. She pressed her cheek closer to the black silk bosom, and told her story in half a dozen words.

"Harry proposed to me this morning."

Oh, luckless coincidence! That the most brilliant offer in the world should come at such a time.

"And you?" said Lady McCorquodale, tremulously. "What did you say, dear?"

Inthia looked up sweetly and shyly for a mere second, kissed her swiftly, and then hid her own face again.

"I said 'Yes,' dear."

Lady McCorquodale gave a heart-breaking sigh. After all, what else on earth could have been expected? The young people had been absolutely thrown at each other from their childhood upward. The whole family, open-eyed, had seen what was coming and at last it was here. And one of the worst things about it was that there was nobody to blame. Not a creature was in fault from start to finish, and yet the condition of things was to her ladyship's mind almost cataclysmal.

"My darling," she said, and she found herself so agitated that she spoke with difficulty, "if you had brought me this news yesterday I should have rejoiced to hear it, and have thought it the most fitting and proper thing to happen in the world."

Inthia had unlocked her hands, and now clasping them before her own bosom, looked at her ladyship with a startled and even terrified air.

"There is nothing to be afraid of, my child. Nothing terrible has happened. On the contrary, there has just been offered to you one of the most brilliant positions in the world. Mr. Frost has laid before you a proposal for your hand."

"Mr. Frost!" Inthia repeated.

"Mr. Frost," said the old lady, "and you must know, my dear, that though we have always looked with the greatest kindness upon Harry, that if we had as much as dreamt of this splendid offer we should never have encouraged his advances for a moment. Now, Inthia, there is nothing to be afraid of, and above all I beseech you not to make a scene. There is nothing I hate like a scene."

The girl's face had gone dangerously pale, and her eyes were wide with fear. Her ladyship was unnaturally petulant at the provoking condition of affairs, but Inthia's look touched her, and brought her back to a moderate and persuasive tone.

"Nothing will be done," she said, "that is not fully and freely of your own doing. Harry will be told of the proposal which has been made, and will I trust have the good sense and right feeling to retire. I think Harry a very manly young fellow, my dear, and I cannot for a moment believe that he will be so selfish as to stand between you and such a prospect. Mr. Frost, to whom I have hinted the position of affairs, is willing to wait for half a year for your decision, but I can tell you, Inthia, I have known

Humphrey Frost all his life and there is no better young man in England. I can see that he loves you very dearly. He is a gentleman, and he will never give you any trouble. I shall not ask you for a decisive answer now, of course, but I shall ask for your serious promise to think it over. I am getting to be an old woman now, and whatever little worldly feeling I may have had has, I trust, long since left me. But I should be blind if I did not see the immense advantages on Mr. Frost's side, and I should certainly be grossly wanting in duty if I did not do my best to impress them upon you."

This harangue had given Inthia time to collect herself.

"I shall be sorry to disappoint you, auntie dear," she answered, "but I shall never marry anybody but Harry now."

"Inthia!" exclaimed her ladyship, "I will not accept an answer of that kind at this moment. It is not what I ask for or desire. What I wish you to do is to consider Mr. Frost's proposal, and to prepare yourself to give him an answer in half a year's time."

"If Mr. Frost cares at all," said Inthia blushing, "it will be far better and kinder to tell him now. I esteem Mr. Frost very highly, and I think that his wife will be a very fortunate woman, but—"

The pretty face was sweetly obdurate, and as she looked at it her ladyship's hopes sank to zero.

"I shall tell Harry," she said, "and expect him to resign his pretensions."

"Auntie dear," the girl answered, with sudden tears

in her eyes, "you have been everything to me. Don't let us be angry with each other, and suffer for nothing. If Harry is to be told of this I shall tell him of my answer."

"Inthia!" said the old lady, "you are an ungrateful, disobedient child."

Then there were tears, not on one side merely, and then a reconciliation, and new beseechings on her ladyship's side, but no change on Inthia's.

"You come too late, Humphrey," said her ladyship, when at length she found courage to face the unfortunate suitor. "That dreadful boy has proposed this very morning, and Inthia has accepted him."

"She declines to take my proposal into consideration?"

His face had grown as white as Inthia's had been half an hour before, but his voice was calm and steady.

"She declares, my dear Humphrey, that nothing will change her."

"Tell her, if you please," said Humphrey Frost, "that nothing will change me either. My offer holds good for my lifetime."

CHAPTER V.

LADY MCCORQUODALE'S ideas with respect to Harry Wynne underwent a rapid and most logical change. Her ladyship had lost no time in informing the young gentleman of the offer Mr. Frost had made, and she did not suffer him to remain for a moment in doubt as to her conception of what ought to be his sense of duty. His plain and obvious course, so Lady McCorquodale told him, was to retire at once from the field, and leave Inthia free to accept that magnificent offer. It was not unnatural, perhaps, that the young man should have quite another notion about his duty. There was a hot scene between them, and there were things said on both sides of which, in their cooler moments, neither of the disputants approved. Harry denounced her ladyship to her face as a wicked old woman, and the phrase made her dislike him cordially for the rest of her days. It was not the epithet "wicked" which affected her so seriously, but the stinging and only too veracious one which followed it.

"If Inthia tells me to go I will go," Harry had said ; " but I will accept my dismissal from no hand but hers. What right have you to try to play fast and loose with her affections ? Do you think Inthia doesn't care for me ?" There were scalding tears in his eyes as he spoke, for her ladyship had shown clearly that she meant to be bitterly uncompromising, and his whole heart was aflame against the sordid mammon worship she had preached to him. "Do you think I don't care for Inthia ? Haven't we been thrown together from the time when we were babies ? Haven't we been taught to think always that we should marry one another ? Do you think that Inthia is a white slave, to be sold in the market to the highest bidder ?"

He choked with wrath and shame, and a lad's honest sense of championing the cause of the girl he loved and of his own heart. Of course there was some egotism in it all, but it was natural and just, and at least he was so firmly rooted in his own sense of right that the accusing verdict of the world could not have changed him.

Her ladyship knew to the full as well as he how right he was, but being set upon her purpose, and having only a much smaller right on her side she felt it all the more necessary to be angry. She told him that he was acting a selfish and despicable part in trying to bar Inthia's way to so splendid a fortune. He went pale at this, and stood up quite quietly.

"If her own heart does not stand in her way, Lady McCorquodale," he said, "I beg to assure

you that I won't. Shall I ring and ask for Inthia?"

This was an altogether triumphant stroke, and so routed her ladyship that there was nothing left for her but to march from the apartment with as fine a show of contempt and indignation as she could assume.

The young man so suddenly grown dreadful to her ladyship's eyes was actually in the house with Inthia, and could not be got rid of at a moment's notice. And, apart from that, her ladyship knew well enough that the first hint of persecution would strengthen the young people, and make her own task more difficult. It does not matter in the least what the Church may be—the blood of the martyrs is its seed. To make life difficult to these young people was to make her own cause impossible. So the inevitable interview between Inthia and Harry came about that afternoon, and the two young creatures clung together for safety in the midst of the first storm which had ever shaken their souls. They cried together, and the stalwart boy held the little girl to his breast, and swore inwardly that he would face a thousand deaths rather than be parted from her. Neither of them dreamt in their ignorance of thanking Humphrey Frost for setting this exquisite intoxicating cup of happy sorrow to their lips. He had opened their eyes and they were innocently ungrateful. They had never known until then how much they had loved each other, but as each clung to the other in a superb abandonment to loyalty they forgot to bless their benefactor.

The honest Humphrey could have chosen no better

way of bringing happiness to the heart of the girl he loved. There was a poignancy of delight in sailing through these tempestuous seas which is never known to love in fair weather.

To everybody but the two lovers the Christmas season was a grim and arctic time in the house of Lady McCorquodale, and the beauty of the thing was that whilst Harry and Inthia conceived themselves to be profoundly unhappy and ill used, they were tasting such sweetness as is only once in a lifetime presented to mortal lips. The Misses Arabella and Julia looked on the girl with a wonder the purity of which was occasionally alloyed with a faint tinge of contempt. Their excellent mother pointed the moral and adorned the tale for the edification of their hearts and minds. Thus, the good lady would say, were the brightest prospects clouded. Such a cankerworm could a romantic folly lay in the rose of social hope. The young ladies listened to the maternal vaticinations in an ecstasy of faith. Would that such a chance had fallen to either of them! The unselfish Arabella would have yielded it to Julia if only for the sake of the invitations. Inthia was surely mad, or at the most charitable construction was posing as Constancy for a time whilst she kept an eye on the main chance. There are sides of feminine human nature which the smaller kind of philosopher finds a ghastly joy in studying. The best lover of the sex chooses to blind himself, and is certainly none the unhappier. A true study of the meaner qualities of women would eclipse the gaiety of nations.

Those icy holidays came to an end, and Harry Wynne went back to the world's business. He might have carried the brand of Cain upon his brow, and have been scarcely more avoided by her ladyship. After the one unescapable shindy the majestic woman displayed for him a contemptuous pity and amazement which was hard to bear. She and Mrs. Brotherick used to ask each other if ever such assurance were seen before such as the young man displayed in staying his appointed time. The unruly young villain! Why would he not lie down before the wheels of Juggernaut and have life and light and hope and love crushed out of him respectably and in decent quiet? If ever to the eyes of two elderly ladies a young man's plain duty stared him in the face it did so in the case of Harry Wynne. He had nothing to do in the world but to go away and be quiet. If he did so it was as evident as anything could be that in a little time Inthia would yield to Humphrey Frost's advances. They meant the girl no harm. They meant the boy no harm. They believed themselves utterly wise and unselfish.

They were not disposed to rest without allies, since the most powerful were to be had for the mere asking. Lady McCorquodale made a purposed visit to Bridgebourne Court, and there had an interview with the head of the family, before whom she laid the case. The old earl, who had never been guilty of more sentiment than mere youthful heat of blood gave warrant for, accepted at once the common sense view of the case. The boy's posi-

tion was ridiculous and indefensible, and he must be made to feel it. Humphrey Frost was a most excellent match for Inthia. The best conceivable match for her. The venerable nobleman so fumed and fretted at the idiotcy of these young people that he gave himself a headache. The idea of their supposing that their crude and infantile sentimental emotions were to be allowed to govern life! His lordship would as soon have thought of arresting a special train because a butterfly had happened to alight on the rail, as of altering the economies of life for the sake of their romantic notions.

Lord Hounes shared his father's opinions, and even went a little beyond them. He had that excellent reason for disliking his young relative which is already known to the reader. The young reprobate had tried to borrow money, and nothing but success in that rather hopeless enterprise could have made the offence more unpardonable. His lordship had never been troubled by sentiment. He had married for money, and if his bride's wealthy father had failed in cotton, and the promised million had never reached him, the misfortune at least was traceable to no fault of his own. He had always been virtuously conscious of the best intentions. He admitted that he had at one time been in favour of the match, "but," said his lordship, with that original sagacity which distinguished him, "circumstances alter cases."

His lordship's only son, Charles Seaforth, who would one day in the course of nature become Earl

of Bridgebourne, was also admitted to the family councils, and also took the commonsense view of the case.

"The little girl's a little fool, and the boy ought to know better," was his verdict.

Thus fortified in her opinion, her ladyship went home to Norwood, and actually opened operations with some vigour, writing a long letter to Harry, in which she expounded the family conviction, and enveloping Inthia's life in so cold and comfortless an environment that the girl became profoundly unhappy—really and genuinely unhappy this time in her sweetheart's absence.

A curious and unexpected result arose from all this. Captain Peter Heaton, standing at the window of his chambers on the first floor of a house in St. James's Street one fine March afternoon, beheld the pinched and careworn face of Lord Hounes, and immediately afterwards recognized in the tottering old figure at that nobleman's side the Earl of Bridgebourne. The venerable earl and his son were on their way from Arthur's to White's, and the less aged nobleman supported the more elderly with that marked air of deference and filial piety which he always bore towards him in public. Whilst Captain Peter Heaton with no particular interest watched the pair past the smoke of his cigar Harry Wynne came striding swiftly round the Piccadilly corner, and catching sight of his relatives approached them, and holding out one hand in salutation, raised his hat with the other. To the captain's amazement, the two elders of the house turned a chilly stare upon

their relative and mounted the steps of the club, leaving him planted hat in hand, and looking after them for a moment with an expression of complete confusion and bewilderment. Captain Heaton whistled long and low, and kept an eye upon the young man until he moved away. The cut was public and open ; a score of people had seen it, and all glances followed the young man thus snubbed in vivid curiosity and conjecture

Captain Heaton took his hat, gloves, and walking cane, and went out in search of information. He found several people who were prepared to tell him all about it, and a good deal more, but their stories differed, and he had to piece the probable facts of the case together as best he could. In effect, he concluded that Harry Wynne desired to make a disastrous marriage, and was so set upon that foolish course that the family had determined provisionally to abandon him.

A messenger dispatched in a cab to Hump's residential chambers brought that gentleman to Mr. Butterfield's private room in Conduit Street. Captain Heaton and Mr. Butterfield were there already. Captain Heaton stated the case in the concisest terms, and it was unanimously decided that it was necessary at once to exercise so much pressure as would enable them to discover the actual state of the family feeling. The family feeling was their only security for their joint and separate interests in two thousand three hundred pounds.

To this end the three gentlemen were discreetly indiscreet. They allowed it to be known in quarters

from which it was likely to reach the Bridgebourne ears that young Wynne was going the pace. He was probably, so the artful rumour ran, entangled with some expensive person of the other sex—here rumour touched the name of a burlesque actress or two whose characters were too well established to suffer by the scandal—and he was known to have run in debt to Butterfield of Conduit Street to the tune of three or four thousand pounds.

Mrs. Brotherick was the first to hear this awful and rejoicing news. She was heart and soul with Lady McCorquodale and Mr. Humphrey Frost, and as she herself observed, she had the sacred feelings of a mother, and would have known her duty to her own child if Providence had blessed her humble deserts with such an offer. She took the story with a shuddering joy to her majestic relative and patroness. The dreadful abandoned boy had given himself into their righteous hands. He was wickedly pretending all this romance for Inthia whilst he gave himself over to the enticements of some shameless Delilah who wore tights in public, and had doubtless been the ruin of a score of wicked young men whose bones she kept in her cavern.

“This,” said her ladyship sternly, “shall be inquired into without an hour’s delay.”

She rang the bell at once, and ordered the carriage. She attired herself in her costliest saules, as if for a visit of state, and came down inflexible as fate, as disposed for war as Boadicea before the Romans. She drove straight to town, accompanied

by Mrs. Brotherick. To the minds of both the ladies there was a spice of naughtiness about Mr. Butterfield's shop and clientèle which lent a zest of appetite to the adventure. Naughty creatures whom a bishop's widow could only think of with indignant stately tremblings had set foot upon the waxed oak parquet of that sinful floor. The man who dealt with those people must himself be wicked as he who drives fat oxen should himself be fat. In the space of an hour, filled in by who knows what of hope and indignation the carriage rolled splendidly into Conduit Street, and pulled up before the jeweller's door. Swift and smooth came an obsequious polished youth from the inwards of the establishment, and bowed the ladies in.

Her ladyship presented her card, and the jeweller, with that saponaceous, soft, continued gesture of worship with which he always stood at the shrine of the British aristocracy, bowed and smiled and rubbed his hands, and smiled and rubbed his hands and bowed. Not often had so terrible a figure as the defunct bishop's lady presented, entered that neat and wealthy home of art.

Her ladyship desired to speak with Mr. Butterfield in private. Mr. Butterfield, urbanely worshipful, conducted his visitors to his private room, set out chairs for them, and stood before them to receive their orders, an embodiment of business courtesy.

"I have heard a dreadful story, Mr. Butterfield," her ladyship began. It was not her custom to go beating about the bush at any time, and now she felt that if ever female did well to be angry she

was the woman. "I am told that Mr. Harry Wynne, my great-nephew, is terribly in your debt."

Mr. Butterfield rubbed his hands, and smiled with uplifted eyebrows.

"I really do not know," he answered, "how your ladyship became possessed of the information."

"It does not in the least matter how I became possessed of the information, sir," her ladyship responded. "Be so good as to tell me if the information is exact."

Mr. Butterfield smiled and bowed and rubbed his hands, expressing in face and attitude the politest subserviency to her ladyship's desires and the politest deprecation.

"Mr. Wynne, your ladyship, has certainly honoured me with his custom."

Her ladyship and Mrs. Brotherick exchanged a glance. The glance on the one side expressed a bitter triumph, and on the other was at least meant to express an agony of sympathy.

"Tell me, if you please," said her ladyship, "what he purchased from you, and to what extent he is indebted."

"Really, your ladyship," Mr. Butterfield smiled with an air of complete discretion.

"Kindly answer my question, if you please," said her ladyship imperiously.

Mr. Butterfield still rubbed his hands, but assumed a look of pathetic unwillingness.

"If your ladyship insist——"

Her ladyship did insist, and insisted with added imperiousness.

"It is not customary," said Mr. Butterfield; "it is very far from customary. Your ladyship must know that in transactions of this kind a certain discretion is expected from a tradesman. If it were known that I yielded to anything except the strongest family pressure in a matter of this kind it might affect my connection to an extent of thousands of pounds. I assure your ladyship—thousands of pounds."

Mr. Butterfield was a good comedian, and well in practice. Her ladyship took high credit for having forced him to show his books. The account ran:—

"To one centre ornament, eighteen carat gold, to form brooch, centre of bracelet, centre of rivière, and ornament for the hair, with eighteen carat gold bracelet, brooch and ornament mounts, set in brilliants, and to one rivière of thirty-eight brilliant diamonds set in eighteen carat gold, in case complete £2,300."

Her ladyship remarked in silence that Mr. Butterfield had with evident purpose omitted to set forth the weight and quality of the diamonds. She and Mrs. Brotherick leaned over the book together, with their shoulders in shuddering contact. Mrs. Brotherick mutely turned her eyes to heaven, clasped her hands, and rested in that attitude of invocation and astonishment for a full half-minute whilst her ladyship glanced from her to the accusing volume and back again. To both of them at that moment Harry seemed a sinner past redemption. They had visions of the wicked creature in tights, and their imaginations hovered round strange scenes of orgie,—vulgar, polluting, vague.

"Are you aware, Mr. Butterfield," her ladyship

demanded, "that Mr. Wynne is utterly unable to pay for this mad, this extravagant, this sinful purchase?"

Mr. Butterfield took care to be overwhelmed by this inquiry, but kept self-possession enough to murmur his trust that Mr. Wynne's family would not allow him to be a loser by his confidence in the young gentleman's representations.

"His family, I can assure you, sir," her ladyship responded, "will not be answerable for one farthing of debt incurred for such a purpose."

When the ladies had withdrawn Mr. Butterfield seemed more cheerful than might have been expected of a tradesman who had just learned of so severe a loss. He despatched a note to Captain Heaton, informing him of the event of the afternoon, and concluding with the statement that in his opinion now was the time to put the screw on. Mr. Butterfield did a rather extensive and peculiar business. He had already twice disposed of the jewellery he had sold to Harry Wynne, and having in each case parted with it to a wealthy and inexperienced young gentleman, and in each case repurchased it from the Delilah to whom the wealthy and inexperienced young gentleman had presented it, he now felt himself on velvet. His terms for selling and his terms for buying were naturally very different, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that whatever came out of the latest transaction came as pure profit. The wealthy and inexperienced young gentlemen who had already owned the ornaments were, like their successor, protégés of the good Captain Heaton, whose

introduction to expensive tradesmen was often at the service of the gilded youth, his friends.

Lady McCorquodale and Mrs. Brotherick drove straight to Eccleston Square, and were set down at the house of Lord Hounes. His lordship was at home, and received her ladyship without a moment's delay. The horrible story was told, with interjectory denunciations and uplifting of the hands. Surely such a prodigal orphan had never hitherto been heard of in the history of the world. The trio of indignation rose sour and shrill, and the three vied with each other in condemnation of the young man's heartlessness, his infidelity, his fidelity, and all he had done and would not do. When they had done with him the common carrion crow of scandal might have declined to pick at his disfigured carcase. There is nobody who can malign a youthful wrongdoer like the elders of his own blood.

His lordship, who was not an active man as a rule, was for prompt and vigorous action. The confidential old family butler was sent for and despatched to Mr. Fergusson's office in the city in Lady McCorquodale's own carriage, with instructions to return immediately with Mr. Wynne. Pending the young man's arrival they slew his thrice-slain character again and again, and by the time he came they were in such a state of solemn, wrathful awe at his wickedness as they could find no words for. Lord Hounes, as representing most nearly the family's sublime head, took the peccant youth in hand. He stood upon the hearthrug, with one hand beneath his coat-tails and

the other thrust into his waistcoat, in that attitude of natural dignity he had been wont to assume before his constituents, and in the House. The ladies, in their out-of-door attire, sat at either side of him.

"Young man," said Lord Hounes, "we have sent for you in order to give you an immediate opportunity of explaining a transaction which bears upon its face indisputable evidences of the blackest turpitude."

"In that case," the criminal returned, "it may be hardly worth explaining. Your lordship was good enough not to know me when last we met. I thought it possible that you might have wished to make an apology."

At this daring speech, which indicated a wickedness beyond his years, Mrs. Brotherick shuddered violently, and became rigid. Her ladyship flounced in her chair, and gave vent to an inarticulate note of contempt and anger. Lord Hounes withdrew the hand which had rested in his waistcoat, and magnificently waved the accused to silence.

"Your insolence," he said, "can serve no object. It is useless to say that it may exacerbate the wound you have already inflicted upon the family feeling and the family character and the family pride, a feeling, a character, and a pride, sir, which are not accustomed to be dragged through the humiliating dust of base intrigue, or——"

Harry relieved him from a dilemma, for his lordship positively saw no fitting close to his period.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Will you be so good as

to tell me what I have done? I may be better able to accept your denunciations afterwards."

The young man was sore against his titled relative, and thought he had a right to be. Lord Hounes had publicly insulted him, without a cause that he himself could trace, and the boy had no more idea of the meaning of his lordship's oratorical greeting than the man in the moon might have had.

"Lady McCorquodale," said his lordship, suppressing himself by an heroic effort, "has just returned here from the shop of Mr. Butterfield, a jeweller, in Conduit Street." The criminal turned a little white at this, and winced. He had thought it punishment enough for his past recklessness that he should have to pay something like a thousand pounds for a year or two's interest on three hundred, and he had not counted on the humiliation of discovery. It was bad enough to know that he had been a fool, and that he had so heavily crippled his own resources. "She has learned there," pursued his lordship, "that you are infamously in debt there, and that the objects you purchased could have but one destination. You pretend, sir, to aspire to the hand of an innocent and charming young lady; you persist with a degrading selfishness in standing in that young lady's way to wealth and an honourable position; you profess yourself to be animated by a lofty and Quixotic attachment, and in the same hour with all this you pursue an intrigue with some vile and abominable woman whom you hide from the eyes of your family and of the world."

“That is absolutely untrue, sir,” Harry answered.

“Untrue!” thundered his lordship. “Lady McCorquodale and Mrs. Brotherick have with their own eyes beheld the evidence of your infamy.”

The young man’s blood boiled, but he restrained himself, and indeed the thought that they were stabbing at him through Inthia so sickened him a moment later that he had need rather to spur than to control himself. For a mere instant the thought assailed him that the construction Lord Hounes put upon his purpose was manufactured for the family uses, but he himself was too natively just-minded to hold that suspicion long. He had to admit that the charge looked probable.

“May I ask your lordship,” he said, “to employ a little moderation? Will you do me the bare justice to tell me of what you accuse me?”

“Do me the favour then,” returned his lordship, “to respond categorically to my inquiries. Are you, or are you not, indebted to Mr. Butterfield?”

“I am indebted,” Harry answered, “to Mr. Butterfield in the sum of two thousand three hundred pounds. I have a constant assurance that he will willingly wait two years for the money, and in that time I expect to be able to pay him.”

“Indeed!” rejoined his lordship, with a sneer, which set Harry’s blood racing and boiling again. “And now you will tell me with what other object than to pander to your own vices you made that extravagant purchase! For whom did you buy those jewels?”

"I bought them for myself," he answered desperately.

His lordship and Lady McCorquodale broke into a scornful laugh at this.

"You expect us to believe that?" her ladyship asked.

"I expect to be believed in whatever I may say. I have a right to expect to be believed."

"To whom did you give those jewels?" her ladyship asked. She was disposed to be directer in her inquiries than her brother. "You may as well tell us the creature's name at once, and put an end to this disgraceful scene."

"This," said the boy desperately, "is a private matter of my own. I have given no man the right to hold such language as Lord Hounes has used to me. If it concerns you to know that I bought the jewels I have owned the fact already. When I fail honourably to pay for them I will submit to anything you may choose to say to me."

This was all very well in its way, and he was conscious of enough right on his side to allow him to be angry and disdainful at the charges brought against him, but the thought of Inthia came again. They would tell her this wicked story, and would do their best to make her believe it. That cooled his courage, and he went on in another tune.

"My dear Lady McCorquodale, I give you my word of honour, my most solemn and unreserved assurance, that your suspicions concerning this affair are utterly unfounded."

“And you bought the jewels?” said her ladyship.

“I bought the jewels.”

“To whom did you present them?”

“I presented them to nobody.”

“Then you have them now?”

“No. They are no longer in my hands.”

“Where are they?”

“That, with all due regard to your ladyship, I must decline to say.”

His lordship's mind was suddenly enlightened, and if he had seen fit he could at that moment have hit the nail on the head at the first blow. But he was a bit of a diplomatist in his way, and preferred to nurse his conclusion as a secret. He remembered Harry's visit, and his urgent request for a loan. The stones had been made away with, and the young man would not confess it. But since Providence had put in the family hands such an excellent means of separating him from Inthia as the surface story of the purchase afforded, he felt that it would be actually sinful not to use it.

“Very well,” her ladyship responded, rising and drawing her furs about her. “You understand, Mr. Wynne, that Inthia is my ward. I shall permit you to hold no further intercourse with her, and I desire that in future you will not address me or claim acquaintanceship in any way.”

“Be good enough,” interjected his lordship, “to consider our knowledge of each other at an end. If you have any hope that your family will assist you in this shameful matter I take upon myself to say that to

whatever extremities you may be pushed, that hope is, and will remain, illusory.”

After this there was nothing left but to go, with whatever dignity was possible, and the Pariah, thus solemnly ejected from the family circle, went away without a word.

CHAPTER VI.

FOUR or five hours had gone by before he could properly be said to think of anything. He walked unconsciously straight back to his chambers, and sat there in his gloves and hat, sternly surveying a wild whirl of inconsequent and incongruous fancies. He was like one dazed by a heavy blow on the head, too stunned to feel his own pain. It occurred to him often to think that he took things very easily, and once he said, with Hamlet, that he was pigeon-livered, and lacked gall to make oppression bitter. He could not even find energy to be angry at the epithets Lord Hounes had hurled upon him, nor even—stranger still—to care greatly about Inthia's wounded heart when she should hear the calumny. Bit by bit the pain sharpened, the stunned feeling cleared away, and his mind got to work again. He began to think it inevitable that on the evidence against him Inthia must believe him guilty. He told himself that nothing in the world should have persuaded him that she was unfaithful to him in a thought, and out of

his own loyalty he brewed a cordial, warm and spiced enough to cheer his failing heart a little. Its effect was transitory; the evidence against him was too strong. What could she do but believe that which everybody about her believed. He was forbidden her presence, and he knew how, with the exception of Inthia, everybody hailed his seeming downfall. They would press Humphrey Frost and his millions upon her now, and perhaps, in the sore desperation of her heart, she might accept him. He prowled up and down his room like a beast in pain. It is hard to be young and alive from head to heel, and to be thus fettered by the impossibilities, to stand behind invisible bars beyond which there is no passage, and to see the soul's desire borne, passionately weeping, away. His own impotence writhed in him, like a twisted arrow in a wound. He was helpless, helpless, helpless! He could do nothing.

Yes. One thing at least he could do. He could write to Inthia, and tell her the whole truth from first to last. It was humiliating, but by contrast with the lie the truth looked heavenly bright. He had been to blame, foolishly, wickedly to blame, but he was no inmate of the sty where Lady McCorquodale's fancy saw him, the vile place Inthia was to be told of as his natural habitat. True to her! How could he be otherwise than true to her? all purity, truth, and goodness as she was. Could he leave the innocent tenderness of her eyes and the sweet welcome of her hands? That was a physical repulsion, a nauseating sickness, in the fancy. He was faithful to her to the core; so faithful that fidelity was not a virtue in him.

Inthia meant the sex, and outside and beyond her there was no woman in the world to him.

It was only when he began to look for writing materials that he became aware of the fact that he still wore his hat and gloves. He gave a little mirthless chuckle at the discovery, and removed them. Then he sat down, and began to write. He filled sheet after sheet with wild protestations of truth and love, and when he had finished the letter, behold, it meant nothing to his mind. All the blood and passion, all the heat and fervour, seemed to have stopped short at his finger-tips. Not a tone of the wild kaleidoscopic splendours of his heart had touched the paper. It stared, blank, cold, and meaningless. He tore it across and across and threw it into the fire-grate, and began anew, with the same chilling result. He did not know how the night went by, but the noise of the fretful wind and the plash of the mournful rain outside were part of him. Many and many a time afterwards the noises of the stormy night brought back that time so vividly that his heart ached at them with the memory of its own old pain.

At length, when he seemed to have cast all the scoriæ out of his heart and brain, his thoughts ran clear. He wrote a letter, brief and lucid, in which he told, as well and clearly as another knowing all the circumstances could have told it for him, the story of his entanglement. He did not spare his own foolishness, but he closed with a humble hope that it was over, and that his lesson would last him for his lifetime.

He looked up, and lo ! the day had dawned outside

already. He drew up one of the blinds, and looked out upon the street. A solitary policeman paced, gleaming there in his oilskin cape, and a fog rolled about the roofs of the houses and obscured the chimney-pots opposite. The desolate silence weighed like lead, but he had gone through too much already to have any great keenness of feeling left. He threw himself upon the sofa, and in a while fell stupidly asleep.

The entrance of the house porter with broom and dustpan failed to awake him, but on the man's return with breakfast and letters he made a judicious clatter, and Harry came out of his dreams. He looked at the letters wearily as they lay upon the table, and turned them over with negligent fingers, until he caught sight of Inthia's writing. A great shock went through him, and he knew that he held the news of his fate in his own hands. He tore the envelope open, and the first line he read assured him, and shot warm conviction of safety through him from head to heel.

“My Dearest Harry,—I do not believe a word of the wicked and shameful story that Lady McCorquodale has told to me. She says that we are not to meet again, but that will make no difference to me, and I am sure that it will make no difference in you. You must be brave, dear, and hope and have patience. I dare not wait to write more.—Yours ALWAYS,
“INTHIA.”

He kissed that brave message a hundred times, and hugged it, and kissed it again. Oh! the honest,

loyal heart; the peerless creature! In spite of fog, rain, smoke, and wind, the wide world beamed with sunshine. He dashed rejoicingly into his bedroom, tore off his raiment with rollicking scraps of song plunged into his tub, and emerged from it like a radiant young giant. He dressed, and sat down to breakfast in an exquisite complacency. His inner man reminded him now that he had forgotten to dine the day before. He rang for more eggs, and a further supply of devilled kidney, and made an exuberant meal. What did he care about Lord Hounes and Lady McCorquodale and Mrs. Brotherick now? Their suspicions had no longer power to vex him. He sang that the whole family syndicate might go to Hong Kong, might go to Hong Kong, might go to Hong Kong for him. You would have been hard put to it to find a happier young man in London.

In this joyful mood he was preparing for his daily journey to the city, when the house porter brought him a letter addressed in a hand unknown to him. The messenger who had brought it was instructed to wait for a response. Harry glanced first at the signature, and found that the missive came from Captain Heaton.

"My dear boy," it ran, "for Heaven's sake come round to me at once. Do not lose a moment. It is a matter of the most urgent consequence to yourself."

Wondering what this might mean, Harry marched off in front of the messenger, and in three minutes from his receipt of the letter found himself in Captain Heaton's presence. The morning plumage of the

worthy captain was gay and brilliant. He was in a gorgeously flowered and embroidered dressing-gown, and wore Turkish slippers and a scarlet fez. He had begun his day's work early, and was already engaged over a brandy and soda and a cigar. In the evening, all things considered, Captain Heaton was a youngish-looking man for his years, but in the morning the raffish traits peeped out in the bulbous underlid of his eyes, creased into thick folds, and in the strongly accentuated crows' feet. He offered his visitor a similar refreshment to that of which he was himself partaking, and his offer being declined, he sat in apparently uneasy silence for a moment, tugging at his moustache. To his visitor's mind he bore the air of a man who has an unpleasant communication to make, and is unwilling to make it.

"Do you know, my dear boy," said Heaton, suddenly, as if he had made up his mind to have the unpleasant business over, "do you know, my dear boy, that you've got yourself into a devil of a mess?"

"Upon my word, I don't," returned Harry. "Do you?"

"I shall be deuced glad if I don't," said the captain. "You don't mean to tell me that you don't know what you've done?"

"Now," said young Wynne, lifting his eyes and looking squarely at the captain's face, "to tell you the truth, Heaton, I had enough of that sort of thing yesterday to satisfy me for the rest of my life. If I have done anything, be good enough to tell me at once what it is. If it concerns you in any way I will

give you whatever explanation you may have a right to."

"If he has done anything!" repeated the captain, as if appealing to some invisible third person who knew all about it and was bound to share his own friendly sorrow.

Harry kept a resolute good temper.

"I have done many things in my life," he said. "All sorts of things—good, bad, and indifferent. What is the one thing you want to speak about?"

"Well, upon my word," said Heaton, "you take it coolly."

"I try to," the young man answered.

Captain Heaton threw the theme clean away with both hands, and looked mournfully resigned.

"You—you don't know? You—you don't know?" he said, a moment later, knitting his eyebrows in inquiring wonderment, and leaning across the table towards his companion.

"Confound it all, man!" cried the badgered youth, "I have told you already that I don't know. Do *you* know? Upon my soul I think the whole world's going mad together."

"Oh!" said the captain, with an air of injured friendship, "if you take that tone, Wynne, it's no affair of mine."

"Whose affair is it?" Harry asked.

"Gad!" said Heaton, "I should say it's yours, if it's anybody's; but if you choose not to know anything about it, and to resent a friendly intervention, you may go to the deuce your own way, by Jove, and there's an end of it."

"Will you tell me," asked Harry, rising, "what it is you want to talk about?"

"Oh! well, if you insist on knowing nothing at all about it," returned the captain, "I'll try to refresh your memory. Did you ever meet one Butterfield, a jeweller, in Conduit Street?"

"Yes," said Harry. "What about him?"

"Did you buy over two thousand pounds worth of jewellery from him?"

"I did. And what of that?"

"Will you tell me what you did with the jewellery?"

There was a pause of a second or two, during which Harry regarded the captain with a growing air of sardonic humour.

"I'm glad to see *you* turning evangelist," he said, rather grimly. "I suppose you know Miss Tearsheet's ways as well as anybody. You ought to be experimentally qualified to denounce them. I took a lecture from Lord Hounes and Lady McCorquodale on that subject yesterday; but I'll be hanged if I'll stand one from you."

It was the captain's turn to be bewildered.

"I don't a bit know what you are talking about," he said, "and unless you're an uncommonly good actor, I'm beginning to think you don't know either. Here's a plain question, and you can give it a plain answer if you like. Did you pawn those diamonds?"

"Of course I did. That's what I bought them for."

"Well, good Lord," said Heaton, staring at him, with a beautifully deceptive aspect of astonishment,

"he confesses it! He talks about it as if it were the most ordinary transaction in life! Do you know what you've done?"

"I have told you what I have done."

"No, you haven't, my boy," Heaton responded, in a tone of almost fatherly sadness, "but *I'll* tell *you* what you've done. You've committed a fraud in the eye of the law. You have laid yourself open to arrest and trial on a charge of fraud, and if the case is proved as you confess it you may get two years, with or without hard labour, according to the judge's fancy."

The speech was not a long one, but before it came to an end Harry had dropped back into his chair, staring at the captain with a face so horror-stricken that it cost even that practised gentleman a momentary twinge. Heaton poured out a glass of brandy and pushed it over to him.

"Drink that," he said, "and pull yourself together. My poor boy! why the dickens didn't you come to me? I'd have pawned my last shirt rather than see you in a mess like this. Why didn't you ask somebody? Any man of the world would have told you."

"I did it on Hump's advice," gasped Harry. "I did it to pay him."

"On Hump's advice!" shrieked Heaton. "Nonsense!"

"He was in an awful mess. He wanted the money. He had a bill of mine. You know all about that. He said it was a matter of public bankruptcy for both of us, and he sent me to Butterfield."

"The fool!" cried the captain, with every appear-

ance of rage and amazement. "I wonder if that's why he cleared out last night? Butterfield's furious. I met a man who saw him yesterday after your aunt had left him, and he was vowing vengeance. He swears that you gave him distinctly to understand that you wanted the jewels for a lady, and the first thing he'll do this morning will be to get out a summons. There's nothing for it, my dear boy, but to go to your friends, and rake the money together anyhow."

"My friends," said the victim miserably, "I haven't any friends, except for my uncle Seaforth, and he's got next to nothing. I'd rather suffer anything than go to him."

"You've got one friend, my boy," said the captain sympathetically. "I'm in a deucedly tight corner myself. Half the club owe me money, and I can't stir it. Peter Heaton's everybody's mug. But I've got a loose three hundred. I think I can rake in another, or even two. Call it five hundred. You can reckon on that, Wynne, if you can square Butterfield with it. I'm not the man to see a chum go underground if I can help it."

With that the benevolent captain rose, in so fine a flush of friendly enthusiasm that young Wynne grasped his hand with a hot moisture in his honest unsuspecting eyes. The captain wrung his hand hard.

"We must do our best, my boy. Butterfield's very hard, but he's really been had so often that even if a decent fellow comes across him he gets taken for a sharp. Run over and see him at once. It would be horrible if a thing like this were made public."

"Heaton, old boy," said the unsuspecting greenhorn, flushing with gratitude, "I'll never forget this. You're a good fellow, Heaton. I—I'm—I'm enormously obliged to you."

With that he went away palpitating, in search of Mr. Butterfield. That gentleman had not yet arrived, but his customer waited for him, and in less than a quarter of an hour he came. He was mightily frosty and dignified, and in rubbing his hands no longer smoothed them with soft, propitiatory motion beneath his chin, but wrung them heartily on a level with his watch chain.

"I desire to hold no intercourse with Mr. Wynne," said Butterfield, gazing askance from his visitor, with a solemn and reproving dignity. "The matter is in the hands of my solicitor. It will take its course—its proper and befitting course."

Poor Harry urged the captain's five hundred pounds, and the two hundred he had in hand, but Butterfield was obdurate, and as deaf to persuasion as an adder.

CHAPTER VII.

BETWEEN eight and nine o'clock that night the continental mail flying fast through the dark between London and Dover carried Harry Wynne and his troubles with it. It was a wild night, and there were but few passengers, so that he had a compartment to himself. He stood upright in order that he might read by the light of the carriage lamp a document in which his sorrows were set forth with a dreadful legal precision. This document bore the initials of royalty, and called upon Harry Wynne to appear on that day week at the Marlborough Street Police Court to answer certain charges preferred against him by one William Henry Alexander Butterfield. The charges included fraud, the obtaining of goods by false pretences, and illegal pawning. The reader felt hideously criminal, even in his own consciousness of innocent intent. The fact of criminality clung like tar. Nothing seemed capable of washing it away.

The passenger by the continental mail was not flying from the face of justice. He was in pursuit

of Herbert Whale, whose idiotic or diabolic council, whichever it might prove to be, had brought him to this pass. Mr. Herbert Whale, in leaving London at a critical moment, had taken the precaution not to leave his address where Harry seemed likely to find it. But a five-pound note had unlocked the heart of the club porter, who had murmured "Grand Hôtel de l'Athénée, Paris." The young man was resolute to have Whale back to London to confess the advice that he had given. He would have him there, he declared to himself, if he haled him by the scruff of the neck on foot, and swam the Channel with him. He was as yet unconscious of the fact that the Rapide bore the fleeting Hump southward from Paris almost as fast as the mail train bore himself Paris-wards. That intelligence, however, reached him at what he had supposed would be his journey's end.

Whale had gone to Nice, and though his letters were to be addressed at the Poste Restante, Harry had but little doubt of finding him with ease. There were not more than half a dozen hotels in Nice to which he would be likely to go, and an hour's inquiry would exhaust them. He passed a weary impatient day in Paris. The rain came down in one continuous deluge, and he sat mournfully alone amid a profusion of sporting papers, which he tried to read in vain. Night came at last, and saw him started on his new journey. The skies shone blue in Nice, and the April air was soft and warm, but the change of climate had no solace for him. He took a carriage at the terminus, and sought his man wherever he could

think of. He could find no news of him, and at last decided to run on to Monte Carlo. No gentleman of Mr. Whale's proclivities could rest so near the charms of roulette and trente et quarante without being attracted by them. The Salle des Jeux was the likeliest place for him, and thither Harry betook himself. He steered round every table, and satisfied himself that Whale was not there. He stalked up and down the atrium, sat drearily in the reading room, and for a while tried the concert hall, and did his best to listen to the music.

He stayed that night at the Hotel de Paris, and went back to Nice next morning to renew his search. He saw plenty of people whom he knew, but had no heart to make up to any of them. By and by, and the hunt had gone on now for two or three unsuccessful days, he began to have a grisly feeling that none of his acquaintances cared to notice him. Once or twice he wondered if a veil of invisibility had fallen round him. He bowed to Lady Dyaz and her daughters, and they went by him with a perfect unconsciousness, though he could almost have sworn that they had seen him, and he had danced with the eldest girl not seven weeks ago. This was not the only sign he had. People whom he knew became suddenly engaged in the contemplation of trivial objects when he came in sight, and others had a suspicious knack of going round corners, or of taking the other side of the street.

There was at Monte Carlo a certain Lord Ballystead, one of our hereditary legislators, a born stableman, though he came of an excellent house, a disreputable,

foul-mouthed young nobleman whom nobody trusted, and who had crowned a life of blackguard folly by marrying a ballet girl of unusually blemished antecedents. When it came to this gentleman's turn to show Harry Wynne his back, the young man's cup overflowed with a sudden and galling bitterness. He marched straight to his lordship and tapped him on the shoulder with his walking-cane.

“Good day, Ballystead.”

His lordship's ill-bred scowl looked backwards. He stared blankly for five insolent seconds and turned away. Harry walked swiftly round him.

“Come, Ballystead,” he said, “one dare not know you at home, but one can speak to you here. What's the meaning of this?”

“I don't usually speak to people who've run away from charges of fraud,” responded his lordship. The statement was garnished—*cela va sans dire*. Lord Ballystead walked away, with his stable swagger, and with his walking-stick cocked defiantly under his arm-pit.

There are not many ways of responding to a speech of that sort ; in fact it may be said that there are no more than two, but choice, though limited, is difficult. There is nothing for it but personal maltreatment or silence, and whilst rage and dignity struggled with each other in Harry's mind, his lordship solved the disagreeable problem for him by stepping into a public carriage close at hand and driving away.

Here was the explanation of all averted looks or cold unrecognising glances. Harry wandered in the

warm spring sunshine about the beautiful gardens scarcely daring to look up lest he should encounter some new accusing pair of eyes. This fit soon passed, and he was marching about in a conscious defiance of the world. Nobody had the right to brand him as a defrauder.

He walked back to the Casino, and entered the playing room. It was early as yet, so far as the hour of the day went, but it was getting late in the season, and between the two factors the tables were but thinly attended. Almost the first person who caught his eye was Hump, chastely attired in a chess-board tweed, languidly punting for louis at the trente et quarante. Harry moved quietly towards him and laid a hand upon his shoulder. Mr. Whale turned easily round, apprehending an ordinary acquaintance, and his nerves being somewhat enfeebled by the achievements of the previous night gave a slight start on recognizing his pursuer.

"Come outside a moment," said Harry. "I want to speak to you."

"Hold on a bit," returned the other; "I've got a run on the black, and I want to follow it."

Almost as he spoke the croupier called "Rouge gagne."

"There's your run on the black finished," said the young man soberly. "Come outside. I want to speak to you."

Mr. Whale, not willing to make too great a show of unwillingness, gathered his little golden handful together and slipped it into his pocket. He had gone cool and self-possessed again, and was quite

insouciant to look at. They paused together in the atrium, and Harry came to the point at once.

"You have heard the news about me and that affair of Butterfield's?"

"No," said Hump, feigning astonishment and ignorance clumsily.

"I see you have," said the youngster, laying an unconscious hand upon the lappel of his coat, and holding him more tightly than he knew. "You have got to come straight back with me to London."

"Not much I haven't," Hump responded, making an effort to disengage himself. He had already forgotten his initial profession of ignorance, and made no further pretence that way. The atrium itself was quite clear, but two or three stalwart Suisses loitered at the entrance beyond the glass doors.

"I have to appear at Marlborough Street on Tuesday. There's only just time to get there. You must come and acknowledge your part in the business. I got into this scrape by following your advice. An honest word from you is the only service I can expect from anybody."

"Got into the scrape from following *my* advice," said Whale. "What advice?"

Harry's eyes began to gleam somewhat dangerously, and Hump, among whose personal virtues courage bore no conspicuous place, began to feel uncomfortable, and to wish himself, or the young man, at a distance.

"You told me," said Harry, "to go to Butterfield. You said that he would trust me for a year or

two, and advised me to take what I had bought to Attenborough."

"Jumping Moses!" Mr. Whale ejaculated, with a less convincing display of surprise than ever.

"You mean to deny that?" the young man asked, tightening his unconscious grip upon the coat.

"Deny it!" said Hump, in futile bluster. "What sort of an idiot do you take me for? I tell you to go to Butterfield and buy things and pawn 'em afterwards? Why you're mad!"

"You mean to say that you deny it?"

"I mean to say," Hump responded, swaggering at him, "that it's a blooming lie."

In cases of this kind there are apt to be sudden and spasmodic actions of the muscle for which the reason cannot at all be held responsible. Mr. Whale was on the floor, and there was a curious touch of wonder in Harry's mind as to how he came there. Mr. Whale looked astonished, but could have explained the circumstance if he had been so disposed. His assailant towered over him, with all the warmth the blow had let loose flaming in his veins and sparkling in his eyes.

"Get up!" he said, grasping his walking-cane in a threatening manner. The discerning Hump thought it more expedient to lie still, but help was at hand for him and came at full speed from half-a-dozen quarters. The indignant assailant was dragged away by as many stalwart hands as could lay hold of him at once, and ignominiously ejected. He went stammering fiercely in French, of which language he was by no means master, and interjecting for the punished

rascal's behoof a savage threat or two in his native tongue. He was lithe and muscular, and unwilling to go, and as a result of all this when he found time to think about it he felt half dislocated from head to foot, and he discovered moreover that his clothes were so wildly disarranged that he was a spectacle for derision. He hid himself in his hotel bedroom, and sat there wrathfully brooding. He could see now what an older and more experienced man could have told him from the start—he had been basely victimised. He set down Hump and Mr. Butterfield as accomplices, and could only wonder how so excellent a heart as Captain Heaton could find it in his nature to associate with them. The two villains had plotted together to get two thousand for a beggarly three hundred, and had made a mistake as to his resources. He felt ruined, disgraced, and desperate. His assault on Mr. Whale had done no more than waken appetite, and he so tingled with wrath as he thought of him that in his more reasonable moments he understood himself, and was thankful that his enemy had been taken from his hands. He smoothed his ruffled feathers as best he could, and changed his torn attire. When he had once more made himself respectable to look at he went down stairs and sat in the hotel reading-room, painfully conscious of any chance look that touched him, and sensitively sore to every little attrition with the world. He took up an English newspaper, and read absently the news from the East. That obstinate Eastern Question, which never gets solved, had been in full cry in all the European journals for months. Now the Bear was going to find

a solution for the Turkey's difficulties by eating him, which, all things considered, seemed to be about the readiest if not the only way. The Russian artillery forces were languidly hammering at the Turkish forts on the other side the Danube. The war had opened spiritlessly, but everybody knew that it would wake up in a while. The news Harry Wynne read made the waking seem imminent. The Russian forces were pouring southward, and the Turkish streaming northward to meet them. Sulieman Pasha was definitely appointed Commander-in-Chief to the army in Roumania. Bulgarian peasant proprietors, for the offence of owning property desirable in the eyes of the rulers of their various Pashaliks, were being freely hanged. Disinterested patriots of all nations were away to Constantinople to join the Polish Legion.

The lad's young blood was fired already, and the war news, and that mention of the Polish Legion came like fuel to flame. His earliest baby remembrances were of Uncle Percy and his talk of the Redan and the Malakoff, of Inkerman and Balaclava. He had taken in a patriotic hatred of the Russian almost with his mother's milk. His first remembrance of his mother was as she wore her widow's weeds, and his father had died gloriously on the heights of Alma. Patriotism, filial revenge, despair, and the hope of glory filled him all at once. He would leave this vile charge and his accusers behind him. He would go out eastward and strike a blow for feeble right, and make a name or die for it.

He wrote a wild letter to Inthia, telling her something of his purpose. He shed hot tears upon the

paper, but all the pains he suffered served only to harden his resolve. He took the next train for Marseilles, and happening by hazard to catch a steamer of the Messageries Maritimes at the moment of his arrival, was away on the Mediterranean blue at the hour when he should have presented himself at the court in London, leaving a blasted character behind him.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT the Byzance Hotel in Constantinople there was residing at about this time an English gentleman who was entered on the books of the house as Mr. Ronald Morton, of Kekewich, Cheshire, England. Mr. Ronald Morton was a young gentleman of five or six and twenty. He had a tall and graceful figure, a little young and slim for his years, and he presented to the observer one phenomenon which never failed to attract a momentary attention. He had eyes of a clear blue-gray, and a fair complexion, whilst his hair, eyebrows, beard and moustache were black and jetty as the raven's wing. If so young a man could have been suspected of so consummate a dandyism—the thing is rather a refuge for foolish age than a trick of golden youth—the gloss of his curly hair and crisp little beard would have been suspicious. Mr. Ronald Morton, seen at his somewhat elaborate toilet of a morning, would have dissipated doubt. He carried amongst his belongings a bottle, a tiny brush, and a fine silver-gilt comb, and he always took

care when he put these articles into requisition to have an excellent light and a trifold mirror. It was a singular bit of dandyism for a young man, and it was all the more curious because he was so unaffected in his manners, so simple, cordial, and honest in his looks.

He had been staying at the Byzance for a week or two with his charming young bride and her brother. There was a tone of romance about him to the other occupants of the hotel. He made no secret of his own concerns, and was, indeed, a little inclined to be frankly familiar about them even on a short acquaintance. He was the last of an old English family, had more money than he knew actually what to do with, owned land in two or three counties—not enough to boast of, but pretty little estates in their way, and had no creature in the world by whom he could be held responsible. He had availed himself of this freedom in the choice of his wife, who was a pretty little Bulgarian girl, of no particular wealth or station, even amongst the Christian population of the Turkish dominions. The lady's father was a merchant, English bred, and her brother had been trained at Owen's College, in Manchester. Little Anna spoke the prettiest English, and dressing rigorously after the latest Paris fashions, would have passed anywhere as a countrywoman of her husband's.

On a certain fine morning Mr. Ronald Morton sat in his own room with a locked door between him and the outer world. His wife tapped at the barrier, and was answered in that sort of voice which everybody recognizes as being accompanied by a smile. The

smiling voice is recognizable by all ears, and by none more readily than by those of love. Mr. Morton was particularly engaged for the moment, but would join his bride in ten minutes. The happy little lady prophesied her whereabouts and tripped away. Her husband devoted himself to the consideration of a loose pile of business documents, which lay spread on the table before him. It looked as if he were even a wealthier man than he cared to profess to be, for the loose little pile of business documents related mainly to valuables deposited in banks of high continental standing, here, there, and everywhere. There were acknowledgments of sealed packets deposited for safe keeping with the *Crédit Lyonnais* both at Paris and Marseilles, with Messrs. Rothschild at Vienna, Frankfort, and Naples, and with Messrs. Coutts at London. The owner of these agreeable documents was engaged in checking them against an entry in a pocket-book he carried, and in ticking figures for a large amount against each various entry. He added together the amounts with a look of deep satisfaction, and coaxing the papers into order, returned them to a cash-box, which he locked and hid away in the recesses of a great travelling trunk. He locked that in turn, and then presented himself to his waiting bride. The little lady wanted money, and was away upon a shopping expedition. The fond young husband supplied her lavishly, gave her a parting kiss, saw her away from the steps of the hotel, and watched the neat figure as it disappeared into the *Grande Rue de Pera*. He lit a cigarette, and after standing for a moment or two with an

agreeable smile upon his face, he also sauntered into the thoroughfare, and turned to the right. A very few seconds' easy strolling brought him in front of the rival and older hotel, which has so long flourished under the care of M. Misseri. In the dingy doorway of that excellent hostelry stood a hook-nosed man in pince-nez, thoughtfully looking from his toes to the houses opposite, as if he were instituting some comparison between them, but evidently so buried in thought that he saw neither. Mr. Morton, beholding this gentleman, gave a start so faint as to be scarcely perceptible, and swinging round upon his heel, walked leisurely homewards. The agreeable smile he wore still lingered, but a very close observer might have remarked an odd kind of strained attention in it, as if the smile were anxious to know if there were a footstep, or even so much as a look behind him.

He went straight back to his bedroom, and there began to pack with some dexterity and rapidity. He took a last look round to see that nothing had been forgotten, locked his great travelling chest, and sauntered down stairs into the smoking-room. Two gentlemen sat there over a syphon-bottle and a carafon of cognac. They were chatting animatedly, and in their talk employed indifferently French and Italian.

"Vergueil is here," said one. "He is staying at Misseri's. I spoke to him an hour ago. Of course he told me nothing, but what else could have brought him here?"

"That is his business, as like as anything," said the other. "I heard last night that some of the notes had been changed at Hansard's."

"It was cleverly done," said number one. "But these railway robberies are getting a little frequent, eh? I wonder if it is always the same gang. Of course it is not easy to dispose of valuable securities, but they say that the last haul was for two millions of francs. It would seem to be a profitable line of business."

"Dangerous, one would think," said Mr. Morton, smilingly.

The two gentlemen laughed, and responded, "Dangerous enough."

The conversation ended there, and perhaps half an hour later the smiling little bride came back again. Her husband met her with a grave and troubled face.

"Since you left, my dear," he said, in the gentlest tones, winding a protective arm about her waist, "I have received a telegram from Philipopolis. Poor Rae is dying there. I must actually go up and see him. You must go on to Athens with Ivan alone, and I will follow you as soon as possible."

"Who is dying, dear?" asked the bride.

"Poor Rae, my darling," her husband answered. "Dick Rae. You must have heard me speak of him."

"I don't remember, dear," the bride answered, with a downcast face.

"No!" cried the husband in astonishment. "That's strange. Poor Dick went up into the rose country, to bargain for otto of roses. He thought that with the war beginning he would be able to make rare bargains. I strongly advised him to go, poor fellow. I must go up and see him, if I can get there in time. You see that, darling, don't you? You wouldn't care

much for me if even the temptation of your society could keep me away from an old chum at a time like that."

He spoke tenderly and persuasively. The little bride put her arms about him.

"No, no, darling. You must go."

"I knew you would say so, dear. I have packed already."

"May I see the telegram?" asked the bride.

"Certainly, my darling," responded the husband with alacrity, and instantly began a bright, confident search in his pockets. Then the brisk movements slowed down, and his face took an air of perplexity. "What on earth can have become of it?" he asked. Then, with a quick smile, "Oh! I know. I shoved it into my cash-box with a lot of papers I was looking at. The cash-box is at the bottom of the trunk, and it's hardly worth while unpacking everything."

Of course it was hardly worth while to unpack everything. The little bride assented willingly to that proposition, and Mr. Ronald Morton began to make immediate preparations for her departure by the boat that evening. He was quite a model husband, and had the most contriving ways. He assisted his wife and her maid in packing, and overcame many small difficulties for her, and he was so tenderly regretful at their enforced parting, and so full of pity and anxiety for poor Dick Rae, that the little woman became haunted by her own conception of the drawn, dying, waiting face, and was as eager to have her husband gone as he himself was to go.

When all the preparations were completed the

sympathetic young husband went back to his own room, and dropping into a chair there, sat thoughtful and silent for a minute or two.

“Vergueil!” he said to himself. “He had a sight of me once at the *Café des Variétés*. Once in a poor light isn’t much. I’ve changed a good deal in two years. The beard makes a difference.” He rose and scrutinized himself closely in the glass. “The colour makes all the difference in the world. Let me see, I was German then. Fritz von Bilsen, wasn’t it? I think I’m safe. Vergueil’s a smart man, but I think, William, you’re almost as smart as Vergueil. You might begin to dawn on him if you spent a day in his society, but you won’t do that, William, will you?”

The boat for Athens started at four o’clock that afternoon. The bride, her brother Ivan, and her maid were all on board a quarter of an hour before the time for starting, and the thoughtful husband was there to see that she had the most comfortable berth that could be secured for her, and to impress upon the stewardess, by the aid of a golden lira and his own engaging manners, the necessity of attending upon her carefully during the voyage. The bell sounded, there were kisses and farewells, the little bride sparkling between tears and smiles, and the husband delightfully tender to the last.

“She’s a pretty little creature,” he said to himself as he walked back towards Pera. “I wonder if ever we shall fall across each other again?”

He thought wonderfully little of poor Dick Rae, considering how deep a hold upon his sympathies

that dying sufferer had taken a few hours before, but being a bachelor for the time he took a bachelor freedom, ate an excellent dinner at the Café de St. Petersbourg, and passed a quiet evening over his coffee at the Greek open air theatre, a place little frequented by western visitors. He paid his bill over-night, and was ready to take the seven o'clock train northwards in the morning.

He had paid his bill at the cashier's box in the vestibule of the hotel, and had just pocketed his receipt when he heard his own name pronounced.

"Monsieur Morton."

The voice spoke at the other end of the vestibule, and he turned to find that one of the hotel servants was addressing a gentleman who was a stranger to him. The man accosted turned, and the servant, with a start of surprise, made his apologies.

"I beg your pardon, sir. An error."

The stranger was a young fellow eminently English in aspect, and of the best English type. Slender as yet, but giving promise of a rare solidity, and facing the world with a handsome though boyish and unbearded face, and a pair of eyes which expressed a pleasing candour.

The hotel servant moved away from him and approached the husband.

"I mistook the gentleman for you, sir," he explained. "*Il y a une telle similarité.*"

The young Englishman smiled at this, and Mr. Ronald Morton smiled back again. The servant's business related to nothing more important than the transfer of the luggage in the morning, and when it

was over Mr. Ronald Morton crossed easily over to the young stranger and addressed him.

“That fellow took you for me,” he said, “and upon my word I don’t wonder at it.” When I turned at the sound of my own name and saw your back I couldn’t be sure for the moment that you weren’t me. Perhaps a man hasn’t a very intimate acquaintance with his own back aspect, but you see the waiter confirmed me beforehand.”

At this the young stranger gave him the smile his jest and his own smiling face demanded, and they fell quite naturally into talk together. They were both young men, and in the course of a quarter of an hour they found themselves exchanging a certain limited confidence with each other—Mr. Harry Wynne supposing himself to be in converse with Mr. Ronald Morton, a gentleman whose landed estates lay at Kekewich, Cheshire, and Mr. Ronald Morton knowing himself to be in conversation with Mr. Harry Wynne, a young gentleman of patriotic impulses who had come out to offer his services to the Turk. Mr. Wynne had but a faint acquaintance with the county of Cheshire, and oddly enough had not heard of Kekewich, but as Mr. Morton remarked, the place lay nine miles from any railway, and that explained it. They smoked a cigar in company before going to bed, and Mr. Wynne was sorry when he learned that the other companionable young Briton was going north in the morning.

They parted at midnight, and one of them at least lay long awake, listening to the wild howlings of the packs of dogs careering in the street, and the

metallic stroke of the backchi's rod upon the sounding stones.

At six o'clock Mr. Ronald Morton was astir. He crossed the Golden Horn in a caique under that miracle of sunrise which once in every twenty-four hours in springtime transforms the turbid waters to liquid gold, makes every tree a living emerald, and every mean hut along the shore of Galata a habitation for a poet. Mr. Ronald Morton regarded none of these things, but at every stroke of the sturdy brown legged caiquejee's bulbous-handled oars, thought "So much further from Vergueil and danger, so much nearer the interior and safety." In due time he reached the railway station, and there encountered face to face M. Vergueil himself, pacing the platform, alert and vigilant. Mr. Morton passed him without a sign, and approached the guichet to demand his ticket. M. Vergueil was at his elbow, he hoped and thought by hazard. He asked for his ticket in excellent Greek, with the true accent indeed of an Athenian dandy, was supplied with it, put a question or two in the same easy aristocratic accents, was answered, and strolled away. He saw his luggage safely stowed, and took his place in the carriage he had selected. The whistle sounded and the train started. In a little while it rumbled past the Seven Towers, and then he breathed freely.

CHAPTER IX.

HARRY WYNNE had come out to Constantinople in the first, or glowing, stage of the war fever. The boat which carried him touched at Naples, and had there taken up two or three English officers who were going out in expectation of being attached to that brilliant gendarmerie which was already constructed on paper and never got constructed in fact. The diplomatic and administrative offices of the Sublime Porte would seem to be filled by poets, who construct constantly the most charming and delightful schemes, and pigeon hole them pell mell for the bewilderment or guidance of some far Utopia. The British officers had tried to chill the war fever in the young man's mind, but had in no wise succeeded. The subordinate officials who were concerned in the formation of that lamentable Polish Legion took the task in hand and quieted his pulses a little. He was full of enthusiasm about the Turk, and it was reserved for the Turk himself to damp him. The first word of the oriental tongue the young man learned was Yavosh, which being freely interpreted signifies, "Take it easy," or "Go

slow." You learn that significant expletive in your first five minutes of Turkish experience, and are never allowed to forget it.

A young man whose heart is wrung with unmerited shame, and whose soul is on fire to do great deeds for the rehabilitation of his character, finds the gospel of go slow and take it easy hard to bear. Harry tasted the heart sickness of hoped deferred, and tasted it all the more bitterly because the beginning had such splendid promise in it. He had not been two days in Constantinople before somebody took him to a ramshackle old house in a back street in Pera, and somebody else swore him in as an officer in the Polish Legion. That hopeful body was so carefully constructed that when its directing spirits learned that the applicant was wholly ignorant of the art of war, and had never even been a volunteer, they declined to give him any higher commission than that of a lieutenant. They sent him to a tailor who knew the uniform, and in two or three days—at his own charges—he was attired in it. He walked about in military glory for half an hour, and at the end of that time, discovering himself to be an object of contumely, he took off his plumage and resumed his civilian fashion. He bought a horse and a saddle, a sabre, and a revolver, and waited for his marching orders.

The denizens of hotels in Constantinople about this time began to know the meaning of war prices. There was daily news from the front of a more and more stirring kind, and the natural longing to be in the midst of action was made none the less keen by the

contemplation of a purse which shrank rapidly towards the actual diminishing point.

Master Harry had known duns in his school and college days, but they had known him, and had at least been respectful. He had never seen before him until now the prospect of wanting a dinner, but now that came closer and closer, and at last he saw it face to face. He sold his watch and his ring, and moved into cheaper lodgings. He had brought but one small portmanteau with him, and his linen began to grow dingy. He noticed with a touch of almost abject terror that his boots were wearing down at heel. His horse had to go, and his saddle. He sold the sabre and the revolver a bargain. He came down to his last cigarette and his last coin.

In those same cheap lodgings to which he had betaken himself, which were not far from the lower end of the Shooting Star, there was living a Circassian officer, by name Ahmed Hamil, a jovial blackavised gentleman who had had two or three years' training in Woolwich Dockyard, as likely a place in which to finish a cavalry officer's education as even Turkish ingenuity could find. He spoke capital English, was a royal good fellow, and as poor as Harry himself. They became great friends, and told each other all their hopes and despondencies.

"I am here," Hamil Bey would say, for he was never tired of expounding this one particular grievance, "to attempt to recover a fraction of two years' pay. I shall never get it, for not to pay is a Turkish art, my friend. I wish that you and I could acquire it. If we could we might dine."

Harry produced his last medjidieh and looked at it.

"That would pay for a dinner."

"My young friend," returned Hamil Bey, "you had best keep that for bread. One does not dine on bread, but one can live on it. I," said the brave gentleman, "have an invitation to dinner to-night, and I wish I could take you with me. I could not—it would be an unpardonable impertinence."

The good Hamil was going to dine with Duke Humphrey, but he was willing to spare his companion's wretched resources, and not to let him know it.

"What's going to come of it all?" the lad asked.

The Circassian shrugged his shoulders as if to say that he declined to give the problem house-room. They rolled their last little scrap of tobacco and smoked it lingeringly, making the most of it. Then Hamil Bey went out to walk the streets hungry, under pretence of keeping his dinner engagement.

Harry lingered in the shabby bedroom until the darkness began to fall, and the howling dogs gathered into packs to course about the streets and make night hideous. He was physically a little sick with hunger, and his heart was like a leaden coffin for dead hopes. He seemed to care wonderfully little, he thought, and indeed no man knows the real bitterness of such times as these till afterwards. Memory brings back their hideous nightmare, and the sufferer learns what he suffered.

He arose at last, and wandered aimlessly into the street, toying with the coin as it lay lonely in his pocket. He passed a little French bakery where he had been wont to buy his daily loaf, and his foot

lingered for a moment at the threshold. He went by somehow, not knowing why he resisted his own hunger, unless it were that the unbroken coin were a sort of symbol to him. His careless steps took him up the steep cobbled pavement of the hill of Galata, and led him to the Grande Rue. He shrank a little from the light of the shops and the eyes of the lounging crowd, but he hardened his heart and went on. He passed the hotel where he had spent his first few days of hopeful waiting, and pulled up short before the narrow entrance of the Concert Flamm.

The Concert Flamm was one of half-a-dozen cafés chantants which at this time decorated the Grande Rue de Pera. The main features of all were identical. Each had a small band of Bohemian musicians, each had a fat and under-dressed lady who sang indelicate songs in French, and a meagre English young person who would not have been tolerated at a penny gaff in the East End of London, who interpreted the ditties of her native land. The nightly concert afforded the flimsiest possible shelter to the proceedings of a little gaming hell, where a polyglot crowd punted for silver pieces on a roulette table with twenty-four numbers and a double zero. A highly respectable fat Greek in a frock-coat and a fez spun the wheel and raked in the money. Play ran pretty high sometimes when an adventurer with money in his pockets came that way, but even at its worst the fat Greek made a fat and prosperous thing of it.

Harry lingered at the door of the place for a minute or two. He had been there before, and knew its character. The amusements it offered had no great

attraction for him as a rule, but anything looked better just then than strolling in the streets. He walked up the dirty uncarpeted stair, and stood for a moment at the doorway. The fat Frenchwoman, in a low-necked, short-sleeved dress, had long since been old enough to know better, but she screeched her salt indecencies with a faded relish, and writhed and leered and ogled a thousand times more persuasively than she fancied on the side of virtue. The young exile, faint and heartsick, cast his uninterested eyes about the room, and seeing nobody he knew there passed through it and into the apartment where the fat Greek presided over his toy roulette and his two profitable zeros. There were not more than half-a-dozen players about the table, for the hour was early. Harry stood looking on for a while, caressing his solitary coin with his finger tips. His acquaintance with French literature was not large, but out of it there floated into his mind a phrase of Rousseau's. Balzac quotes it approvingly in the *Peau de Chagrin*, and it was there that he had found it. "I understand play," says Jean Jacques, "only when between a man and absolute ruin there stands his last crown."

"That's my case," thought Harry. He stood fingering his piece, wondering where he should place it. His eye lighted on zero, his hopes were there. He took the fancy as an inspiration, and threw down the coin. He had chosen the red zero, by hazard, because it happened to be nearer to him than the other. There was a faint tinge of hope in that ; red is the colour of hope. His heart began to beat wildly, and he had no courage to watch the revolving wheel.

Turning his head away, and doing his best to look uninterested, he saw Hamil staring at him from a corner, looking pale and worn, and by no means like a man who had found an eleemosynary dinner. In the surprise of seeing him Harry forgot his stake and crossed over.

"I thought you were going out to dinner?" he said.

"I was, my son," the Circassian responded with a flickering smile; "but my man was out. I suppose he had forgotten me."

"Then," said Harry, "you haven't dined at all to-day?"

The Circassian shrugged his shoulders with a repetition of the flickering smile, but gave no verbal answer.

"I suppose I have thrown my last medjidieh away," said Harry. "I'll see what's become of it."

He crossed over to the table, and there on the red zero lay a small pile of gold and silver.

"Is that mine?" he asked swiftly. Nobody answered him. It was not the fat Greek's business to understand English at that moment. He began to stammer in French "Est-ce que ceci——"

"Rien ne va plus!" cried the croupier, and spun the fatal wheel, warning off Harry's hovering fingers with his rake.

"Oui, monsieur," said a fezzed bystander, "vous avez gagné, mais vous êtes trop tard pour retirer la mise."

His wondering look showed that he had only half understood, and the bystander repeated his phrase slowly with explanatory gesture. The fatal wheel

slowed down. Harry's eyes counted the money hungrily. There were six golden lire lying there—almost six pounds in English money. If he had not crossed over to Hamil it would all have been his, and the pair of them could have lived upon it for weeks. He had been but a second too late, and he watched this flying gift of chance despairingly. The wheel stopped, and the marble made its last click. A tremendous blow between the shoulders drove him forward, half across the table, and Hamil's voice roared "Bravo! Chokularishah Padishah!"

At this patriotic sentiment the little crowd laughed, but the fat croupier's face went green.

"Zero rouge," he said, as if the words were plucked out of him, and began with Jewish fingers to count out the money for payment. Hamil made a royal row with the croupier for having compelled the player to leave more than the maximum sum allowed by the rules of the bank, but Harry, cramming the coins into his pocket, dragged the Tchircasse away. They ran down the stairs with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes, and raced up the narrow street until they came to the Concordia. They entered boisterously and demanded dinner, spread the glittering haul upon the table and counted it with eager hands and eyes. They had a hundred and six pounds Turkish, a full half of it in those noble five lire pieces which shine with so glorious a contrast amidst the ordinary metallique currency of the most bankrupt nation in the world. They laughed and sparkled at each other, calling for wine and chaffing the waiter who took their orders. They pledged each other

with chinking glasses, and for one superb five minutes they were gay.

Then they dined. Ye gods! how they dined! The red mullet, the quail, the tomato farci, the mutton cutlets—in the spring of the year the traveller finds nothing but these dishes in the capital of the European orient. In the days of their prosperity they had grown weary of their eternal repetition, and would have exchanged them gladly, as the poet puts it, for “one rump steak, one pint of ale.” But now they were pure ambrosia. When the dinner was over they had half a mind to begin it again, but the counsels of prudence prevailed.

They sat over cigarettes and coffee, and Harry, seeing himself free of the waiter's eyes, began again to count over his gains. This time he divided them into two equal sums, and pushing one pile towards his companion, raked up and pocketed the other.

“What is this, my boy?” asked the Circassian.

“That's your share,” Harry answered.

“No, no,” said the other, pushing it back again, “I will borrow a piece or two if you will let me, but I cannot take it all.”

“Chums' luck,” said Harry. “If I had lost you would have gone without your dinner. We counted this afternoon that the last piece belonged to both of us.”

“Aha!” cried Hamil, “but that was another matter.”

“I should not have won it if it had not been for you. I should have been content with the six, and

should have taken it. Come, it's a free gift of fortune. Take your share and be thankful."

Hamil drew the pile together, and leaned an arm on each side of it.

"You want to see service?" he said. "You want to see the world? You want your chance? If you will let me pay you in the meantime by giving you what you want in that way I will take this as a loan."

"It belongs to you," Harry returned, but Hamil clung to his point and won it.

CHAPTER X.

THERE was a horse for sale in a Turkish village on the green bank of the Maritza, and Harry Wynne was the intending purchaser. The news that a bargain was being negotiated in the street ran like fire from house to house. Venerable greybeards flamed at the tidings ; toddling infancy came gamesomely out to witness the transaction ; cripples on crutches dragged themselves painfully towards the scene ; a wild, surging mob gathered about the purchaser, the salesman, and the horse, and everybody harangued everybody else in an indistinguishable hubbub. There were seconds of silence in the din, and these were utilized by the respective bargainers. The salesman, blessed by the Prophet—he had led a holy and self-denying life and called his neighbours to witness to the fact—had caught a horse which had run riderless from a troop of the accursed Muscov cavalry. He was a gem, a pearl, a miracle, a wonder among horses. Never since the days of Mohammed's milk-white steed had such an animal blessed the sight of man. As an upshot of all

this, he wanted a hundred pounds for him. The young Englishman's interpreter having anathematized him as an extortioner, a Jew, and the son of a Jew, gravely offered twopence, whereupon the intending vendor spat, and gave him over to Tophet and the fire and darkness of the unbeliever. This done, the salesman professed his poverty, but for which nothing should have induced him to treat a moment longer with a wretch so ignominious and contemptible. He would take fifty pounds Turkish for the steed, though he vowed before heaven that it was a robbery of the orphan. The interpreter eyed the beast, and described him in terms of such scathing contumely, that the crowd yelled in mingled delight and opprobrium. Then he offered fourpence. The contending parties separated, spitting backward on the ground towards each other, and objurgating fiercely. Then the crowd entered into active participation in the affair, and every man, woman, and child in it went stark, staring, raving mad. Vendor and purchaser were dragged together, and faced each other with the bitterest upbraidings. The salesman would take twenty—not a piastre less, upon his soul! The purchaser would waste a single pound upon the brute. Beyond that the compulsion neither of fire nor sword should carry him. The interest of the crowd became, if possible more intense. The first ornamental sparring flourishes were over, and the combatants were coming to close quarters. The vendor fell to fifteen, the interpreter rose to two. Then the vendor fell to fourteen, and the buyer rose to three. Then came offers of twelve and four, and there the purchaser stood like a rock.

At every novel offer the contending parties severed and shook the dust off their feet against each other, but the crowd dragged them back again and insisted on the conclusion of the bargain. It was struck at last at seven, amidst a whirl of confusion which Bedlam broken loose could scarcely equal. Vendor and interpreter alike were filled with a sacred joy. The owner of the quadruped had fixed his mind on six, and the deputy buyer would have risen to eight. Each felt that he had outreached the other, and was happy.

In this wise our young adventurer was mounted. It was his first experience of a Turkish bargain, and for a while he was happier in the thought that the bargain had not led to bloodshed than in the business result of it, though an hour's trial made that seem eminently satisfactory. There was such a change in the lad already that his late companions of the Five Year-Old would hardly have recognised him. The fierce sun and free air had tanned his face and hands to a deep brown. The Circassian cap of astrakhan hid his fair curls, and he wore a close-fitting tunic of the native cloth—the brown, fibrous stuff they call shyak.

On the day after his purchase of the horse, the Circassian regiment to which by Hamil's influence he was attached as volunteer received its marching orders and started northward, its band raising inspiring music. They passed fair tracts of peaceful country where over broad flat pastures the cattle grazed, and the villagers drove their teams afield, and wide acres of maize, with its white hair waving in the

summer wind, a sight of beauty. Then they came to the grass-grown desert between the Rhodopes and the Balkans, and so on to the stern fastnesses of the hills. Sometimes the whole body of men would dawdle listlessly along, and at others would go thundering along some rocky and precipitous pass at the wildest break-neck pace, as if the whole tribe had suddenly gone mad. When they got a chance to worry anything they took it, and bands of a dozen or so were continually prowling off to chase some domestic creature with hideous howls and whoopings and a storm of shots. They were provided with the Winchester repeating-rifle, and it was a never-ending joy to fire at anything. The small birds on the telegraph wires were a great attraction to them, and when the wires had been cut in half-a-dozen places the officer in command entered his first protest by hanging a brace of his men, and so put a stop to the pet amusement of the rest.

To the mind of untravelled youth the life was glorious, but there were many hours when the past lay heavily on the adventurer's spirit. There was never a waking hour in which his mind was absent from Inthia. She was his star of hope, and burned always with a pure and steadfast lustre. He was going where deeds of heroism must needs be as plentiful as blackberries, and was resolute, with a boy's unthinking fearlessness, to do his share of them. He dreamed no end of dreams, and Inthia was the life and centre of them all. He was going to win fame and pluck back honour at the sword's point, at the cannon's mouth, in whatsoever dreadful conflict

his mind could picture. The savage band thundered along whooping and shrieking in mere exuberance of animal spirits, and he would ride in their midst with teeth hard set, and every nerve and muscle rigid, sweeping in fancy towards the enemy's batteries.

The regiment rode in any order which happened to please its individual members. There was a discipline of a sort, no doubt, but to the English eye it was invisible. Men wandered off from the track as they pleased, scoured the adjacent country, and caught up their fellows sometimes after an interval of three or four days. Scattered twos or threes would gallop on ahead, and secure a day's idle freedom before the main body caught them.

One day at blazing noon the regiment came up to an old Turk who sat alone on the hill-side overlooking Orkhanie. He gave them news. Gourko's Cossacks had passed by in flying bands, and the Bulgarian villagers had grown insolent at the sight of them. Two Circassians had been shot that morning at the entrance to a Christian village near at hand. The commanding officer mounted the old man behind one of his troopers, and bade him act as guide. The whole body deviated from the main route, and made for the village where their comrades had been murdered. Harry strung himself together in expectation of a piece of swift and stern justice-work, but he was prepared for nothing so murderously swift and stern as he was doomed to see. The village lay in a little sheltered basin of the hills, and the word was given to surround it. That was all well and good, and it was proper that the criminals should be allowed no

chance of escape. But when a signal-shot was fired, and the whole circle plunged narrowing towards its centre, with rifles pealing everywhere, making a ring of fire and death about the place, Harry's heart flushed with a passionate but impotent resentment against this barbarism of vengeance. Shrieking women bore their children hither and thither about the village street. As he rode, he saw one drop and lie still. He sighted Hamil at a little distance and put his horse at his best speed across the broken ground to intercept him, crying out that this was infamous, and a murder of the innocents. He crossed the line of his comrades at his own risk, and a ball sent his kalpack flying. He rode on bareheaded, not knowing how narrowly he had escaped. They were in the village, among the ricks, the little open threshing spaces and the tumble-down houses; rifles cracking and ringing, and sabres gleaming everywhere. The wretched villagers rushed hither and thither helplessly, and were shot or sabred as they ran. In the crowded *mêlée* a sudden face flashed on him, white with terror and despair. He knew it in half a heart-beat, and dashed between it and the Circassian trooper charging with uplifted sword. The horses met, and shocked, and fell together. Somehow Harry was on his feet again, sabre in hand, standing before the man he recognised. He shouted "Inglese! Inglese!" It was the only word he knew that could be of any service. There were a dozen murderous faces round him, full of the lust of blood, when Hamil burst amongst them, calling out to his blackguards to withdraw. They were in no hurry to

obey him, and it was not until he had struck amongst them with his riding-whip, rating them like a pack of hounds, that they dropped back.

"What brings you here?" he asked.

"I am an Englishman," Ronald Morton answered. "I am travelling for pleasure."

He looked so little like it that the Circassian laughed aloud. The man was struck through and through with abject terror, and shook so from head to foot that he could hardly speak. His face was of a gruesome gray, and when he had given his answer his lips went on without his will babbling inarticulate sounds.

"Go back into that hut," said Hamil, "I will give you a guard."

Morton obeyed as quickly as his shaking legs allowed, and Harry, in the effort to follow, felt his left leg collapse beneath him, and rolled over. The tumult of slaughter was still going on, but Hamil dismounted, and caught him by the arm.

"You are hurt?" he said. "You are hit?"

"No," he answered, "my horse fell with me. My leg is numbed, that is all."

Hamil helped him into the hut, and set a brace of malcontent ruffians at the door. These gentry robbed of the pleasures of murder, sat growling, but did not dare to disobey.

Morton, finding himself in safety, began to gather courage, and at first vapoured tremendously about his own coolness under trying circumstances. By and by he grew collected enough to see that silence was his best stronghold, and so took refuge in it.

When he had altogether recovered his wits he began to think of his preserver, whom he thanked fluently.

"Let us have a look at things," said Harry, "I'm afraid something's broken. Help me off with my boots."

Morton helped him, delicately and carefully, but the operation caused excruciating pain. So far as they could discover nothing was broken, but the limb was already puffed and swollen, and at the best that could be hoped for there was no movement possible for it for some weeks to come.

The infernal noise outside had died away, and except for an occasional word of command or a shout from one comrade to another, the clatter of hoofs and the jingling of bridle and arms, quiet was restored, when Hamil dismounted at the door of the hut, and entered. He knelt down and examined the injured limb with a skilful and practised touch.

"I am afraid you're on your back for a month, my young friend," he said, when he had completed his examination. "You have a severe sprain, and I should say the coating of the muscle is broken."

He left the hut, and returning in a minute or two with a garment of white cotton, he tore it into strips soaked them in cold water, and bandaged the injured limb.

"We shall be at Orkhanie this afternoon," he said, "shall I send a litter for you?"

The patient groaned at the fancy.

"Leave me for a day or two," he said, "I shouldn't care about being moved just yet. I don't think I could stand it."

"If I leave you for a day or two," said Hamil, "I may leave you for good and all until the campaign is over. We are going northward."

Even this prospect did not persuade Harry to allow himself to be moved. After the scene of that morning in the midst of which he still lay, his desire for a career of glory in company with the Tchirkasse had undergone serious modification. He was as willing to fight as ever, but he had British notions of warfare, and they did not include the wholesale murder of women and children.

"You had better leave me here," he said, "I would rather not be moved."

"You will have a crowd of Bulgarian dogs here when we have gone away," said Hamil, "and it may go badly with you."

"I am friendly with the people," said Morton. "They know me. I speak their language. There will be no danger."

"You, sir," replied the Circassian, "appear to be courageous in danger's absence."

Morton accepted this sneer in silence. After what he had seen that morning a Circassian officer with his men behind him was the last man in the world on whom to retaliate for a mere insult.

The men were marshalling outside, and were getting ready to renew their march. Hamil went outside for a moment, and hastily returning with arms, and with the news that both Wynne's horse and Morton's were safely tethered at the door, shook hands, kissed his young friend on both cheeks, and went his way.

“If there should be a doctor at Orkhanie,” he said, turning at the door, “I will send him to you. When you recover, follow us. I will leave word of our route at every halting place along the line. Good-bye, and God be with you.”

All on a sudden there was a mighty clatter outside, and the regiment moved away. The two men listened in silence. The noise travelled further and further, growing fainter and more faint, until at last it died.

Harry's first sentiments towards his newly recovered acquaintance were not favourable. Being himself endowed with courage it came natural to him to despise cowardice, and he felt that for the sake of his own internal sense of dignity he would face the inevitable when it should come his way in a more manly fashion than Morton had adopted.

But if Morton were a poor warrior he turned out to be a most kindly and indefatigable nurse, and it is not easy to go on despising a man who is doing you momentary kindnesses. He seemed to know by instinct when the bruised limb wanted easing by a change of posture, and the movement was always so delicately effected that it caused no pain. It appeared that Morton had hired the hut he lived in, and had been there long enough to surround himself with a fair imitation of home comfort. He had all manner of tinned and potted provisions and preserves, and a store of bottles containing different sorts of beverages, from the fiery mastica to the harmless vishnap, the syrup of the sour wild cherry. This

last made an excellent invalid drink, and it was so kindly proffered that Harry could not do less than feel grateful for it. Then Mr. Morton had such winning, caressing, and feminine ways that it seemed unfair to expect courage from him. Before the day was over the two were on intimate terms, and Harry had begun to feel quite kindly towards the graceful weakling whose life he had saved. On his side the weakling was not deficient in acknowledgment, and his assiduity and tenderness as a nurse would have been notable under any conditions.

When all had been silent for some three or four hours Morton found courage to steal outside, and searched the deserted houses for milk and eggs. He returned laden, and brought dreadful news of the scene the village street displayed. There were a hundred bodies there, he declared, all horribly mutilated. His staring eyes and blanched face gave emphasis to his narrative, but he felt the danger over, and busying himself about a little cooking apparatus heated by a spirit lamp he seemed rapidly to recover his nervous tone. He made a capital omelette, and Harry ate his share of it with fair appetite. His limb pained him constantly, and wore him with fatigue, so that an hour after his meal he fell uneasily asleep.

Morton, for an hour, sat watching by him, rolling and smoking cigarettes, and sipping a cup of Turkish coffee with a sybarite air. He looked a full score of times at his companion to assure himself of the soundness of his slumber, and at length crossing the room on tip-toe, opened a canvas hold-all which

lay in one corner of the room, and drew from it an English newspaper which he unfolded with a rustling caution. He hunted here and there among its columns for a special paragraph, and read with frequent glances towards the sleeper. The paragraph was headed "A Ruined Career," and ran thus :

"The whole country will have learned with regret of the disgrace which has been brought upon one of the most ancient and honourable of the great families of England by the folly and extravagance of its youngest member. Mr. Harry Wynne, the great grandson of the venerable Earl of Bridgebourne, is still supposed to be abroad in hiding. His family are unaware of his whereabouts, and the warrant issued for his apprehension at the instance of Mr. Butterfield the well-known jeweller of Conduit Street, remains unserved. The last heard of the culprit was at Monte Carlo, where he committed a wanton and outrageous assault upon Mr. Herbert Whale, a gentleman well known in sporting circles, whose only concern in the matter was, that he was expected to give evidence with regard to some of the youthful criminal's misdoings. It is now regarded as improbable in the last degree that Mr. Wynne will present himself to answer the charges that are made against him. It would be obviously unjust to assume his guilt as a certainty, but it is evident also that only the darkest construction can be put upon his continued evasion of justice."

Morton, having read this thrice over, put the journal back into its old place and sat musing.

"He would be very useful," so his thoughts ran. "The rest are such hulking blackguards. Such clumsy imitations of gentlemen. This fellow is well-bred to the finger-tips. He has courage, too, and one superb advantage. He *looks* as straight as a die. You would almost have to believe him if he lied to you, even though you knew it. That's a valuable characteristic. . . . He mightn't want to join at first. It's pretty certain he wouldn't. He has come out here to get knocked on the head, and put an end to his disgraces that way ; but a month with that leg may do something towards taming him. I must try him gradually. I want a trustworthy helpmate pretty badly. I think he'll do ; and, besides that, I like the lad."

The long day dragged onward to its close. The ghastly and oppressive silence which reigned outside lay as heavily on Harry's mind as on Morton's. He was slightly feverish with the pain of the bruised limb, and sometimes on the stillness sounded voices which he knew were far away. In his half-dreaming, half-waking state bores came and chattered weary nonsense in his hearing. Lady McCorquodale and Lord Hounes made a call of ceremony with Mr. Butterfield, and laboured to prove to the fat Greek who presided over the roulette-table that to mark his numbers by cutting down living people was a wanton waste of human life. He was quite aware through all this that he lay with a sprained leg in a Bulgarian hut, but none the less the inconsequent rubbish of his dreams wearied him with an unutterable boredom. Then, whether it were by some temporary cessation

of his pain he could not tell, but a feeling of balmy ease and rest came to him. He could not tell, either, whether the thought of Inthia brought that sense of ease, or its cool refreshment brought her to his mind. But Inthia was surely there. Her eyes looked at him with infinite soft pity, the purest trust shone in those kind orbs. He moved his hands towards her, and she was gone. It was night time, and the glare of burning houses in the street cast a wild, waving network of light and shadow on the wall. Morton was stretched upon a rug on the floor at a little distance from him, and at times he could dimly see his sleeping face. He carried in an inner pocket the last lines Inthia had written to him. Every motion pained him, but he managed to draw the letter from its hiding-place. He kissed it many times, and it was only when his lips tasted the salt of his own tears that he knew that he was crying. He had had his fits of hopefulness, when he was going to conquer calumny, and ride home rejoicing, with his fair fame redressed, but for the most part the current of his thoughts had set more and more determinately in another direction. Now it seemed not merely hopeless, but criminal, to strive to ally her life with that of a man disgraced and lost as he was. He bade her good-bye in his heart. He would efface himself for good and all. She should never hear more of him, and would fancy that he was dead. He spoke his inward farewells so earnestly that his passion seemed to draw her near to him. They stood heart to heart spirit to spirit. She would have no farewell, but he said it for her sake.

“Forgive me and forget me! I shall love you for ever, but there is no meeting for us any more. Good-bye, dear love. Be happy!”

What can words say to speak the swelling, aching heart?

CHAPTER XI.

IT came out that before the arrival of the Circassian regiment there had been a considerable exodus from the village. The high-spirited Christians who had shot the two Tchirkas from an ambush had been moved to that emprise by the belief that their victims were unaccompanied. Learning suddenly that vengeance was close behind, they gave warning to such of their fellow villagers as were within easy reach, and some score or more of them took refuge together in the hills. When they judged all to be quiet and safe again they came back timidly to reconnoitre. Finding the village street strewn with dead, they raised a terrible wailing, and for a while were more than half disposed to cut the throat of the solitary survivor and that of his companion ; but being at length repersuaded that neither the one nor the other was responsible for the attack, they buried their dead in quiet, and left the Englishmen to themselves. They kept a trembling watch for the reappearance of the enemy, and held themselves in readiness to fly and hide at any moment.

Ronald Morton continued his friendly offices, and since the utmost skill could have done little better for Harry than to leave him to absolute repose he succeeded as well with his patient as a professional nurse could have done. Mr. Morton was in a very curious corner, and though he had greatly more courage in diplomacy than in warfare, he did not care at that time to risk himself in any centre of civilisation. The whole civilised world was up in arms against him. More than one Government was offering a heavy reward for the apprehension of William Reid, and Ronald Morton felt such an interest in William Reid's welfare as no man of his calibre ever felt except for the great Number One. As it happened, Ronald Morton was known in passing to a mere score of people—the little Bulgarian bride and her family included—but William Reid had an almost world-wide reputation, which just at present he was very far from enjoying. He was sorely in want of a companion in his enforced solitude. That was a question of sentiment. He wanted also a well-bred, gentlemanly confederate. That was a question of business. He was one of the adroitest scoundrels in the world, and even in his retirement was full of schemes and plans. In the person of Harry Wynne, proscribed and hunted, Providence seemed to have sent him companion and confederate in one. He thought it unlikely that he would be put to much trouble in securing him, but caution was one of his most rooted habits, and he played so lightly round his theme as he approached it that Harry had no suspicion of him.

He allowed the English newspaper to lie about in his companion's reach, and once or twice saw it taken languidly up and glanced at. He himself, from sheer vacuity, had read its very advertisements, and could tell at a look on what item of intelligence the sufferer's eye rested when he scanned the paper. There was no other reading matter within miles, and Ronald Morton bided his time with patience. Wynne was certain, sooner or later, to come upon the paragraph which concerned him, and Morton's only fear was lest it should be lighted upon in his absence, and he should be unable to judge of its immediate effect. He watched his companion as a cat watches a mouse, but, as fortune would have it, though Harry was constantly taking up the old newspaper, looking at it and tossing it away again, his eye never lighted on the lines which concerned himself. Mr. Morton determined therefore to bring things to a head. He himself took up the newspaper, and read the accusing paragraph with a beautifully managed start of surprise and a stare of stricken wonder at his comrade. He walked up and down the room in so perplexed and disturbed a fashion that Harry was impelled to ask him what the matter was.

Mr. Morton, suddenly gone cold as an iceberg and prim as an old maid, folded the paper so as to bring the paragraph into prominence, and made a show of offering it.

"I have no right to pry into your concerns," he said, arresting himself, "but will you kindly tell me if you are the grandson of the Earl of Bridgebourne?"

"I am," said Harry. "What about it?"

Mr. Morton placed the old journal in his hands, dinting the paragraph with his thumb nail, and retired to a corner of the hut, where he sat down with an air of doubting watchfulness.

Harry read the lines, and made a furious effort to struggle into a sitting posture, but fell back, groaning.

"That!" he cried, beating the paper with his clenched fist as it lay on the floor beside him, "that is what I was ass enough to come away from! That is what I have led the world to think! The scoundrels! The villains! The liars!"

What with rage and shame and the pain he had given himself, he could say no more. He lay clawing at the paper with his right hand, clenched his teeth tightly together, and stared blindly at the roof.

Mr. Morton drew the clumsy three-legged stool he sat on close to his companion's side, and stooping over him, laid a soothing hand upon his shoulder.

"Tell me all about it, Wynne," he said, in a kindly, sympathetic voice. "I think I know an honest man when I see one."

The story was rankling in Harry's mind anew, and it was a relief to tell it.

"About nine months ago I lost about three hundred pounds at *écarté* one night at the Five-Year-Old Club. I am not proud of myself now for having played beyond my means, and I suppose I pretty well deserved everything that came out of it. I found a man who did a bill for me at three months, and when the time came I couldn't meet it. I tried my honest best, but he was in an awful hole himself, and couldn't wait; or, at any rate, he said so."

"Who was your obliging friend?" asked Morton, smilingly. His companion was taking him on to familiar ground.

"A man named Whale. Herbert Whale."

"Oh!" said Morton, smiling more broadly. "The fellow they call Hump? He's a very nice man. Champagne and cigars, eh? Five hundred per cent. per annum."

"You know him?" cried Harry.

"I know of him," said Morton. "Who has knocked about London who doesn't? Shall I finish your story for you?"

"Do you think you can?" said Harry.

"I can try. Let us suppose that Mr. Whale is very desperately pressed for money. He knows a jeweller who will sell you anything, and wait until the crack of doom for payment. A most obliging fellow. Your uncle will take the jewels, Butterfield won't ask more than thirty per cent. over their value. And when you've been innocently guilty of illegal pawning, Mr. Whale and Mr. Butterfield will put the screw on your noble relatives. Was Captain Heaton in it? Ah! I thought so. He's got the whip-hand of the other pair. It's an old trick, my boy. It's been played over and over again. It seldom fails. They seem to have made a hash of it in your case, but they did very well with young Lascelles and young Crawford last year, and I suppose they have somebody else in tow by this time."

Harry did not stop to inquire how this intimate knowledge of affairs fitted with Morton's earlier aspect of wounded coldness. He was mainly occupied in savouring a new bitterness. He had been gulled

by a device so stale that a stranger hearing half the story, could fill in the rest for him. He had known himself a victim, and had now to confess himself a greenhorn, which, *for* a greenhorn, is as unpleasant a thing as can be well imagined.

"You should never have come away," continued Morton, working towards his own purpose. "A clever solicitor would have pulled you through in safety. They dare not have fought the case. But in running away you have thrown up everything. If the case went before a jury now they would convict to a certainty. You're expatriated for life, and that's the plain English of it. You dare not show up again."

"No?" said Harry. "As soon as ever I can cross a horse again, back I go. I'll have it out with these scoundrels and tell the truth whatever it may cost me."

"That's all very well," said Mr. Morton, pursuing his rôle of man of the world, "if you had any witnesses to prove anything for you, but I'll warrant that Messrs. Whale and Butterfield were too smart to give you that chance. You saw them alone. You have no evidence of their complicity, and I'll bet what you like that Whale asked you to tear up the bill when it came back into your hands. Did he?"

"Of course he did."

"Of course he did. And you obliged him? of course, again. That bill was your only bit of evidence, and you threw it away. Before you talk of going back again, look things in the face. You'll go into the dock to be tried for fraud. The witnesses against you are of course the people who bring the charge.

You have no witnesses to call. Your own mouth is closed by the law, and you are not allowed to say a word. Whatever your solicitor says for you is tainted and not worth a straw. You get at least a year, and probably two. You have completed your ruin, and the prison brands you for life. Stay where you are, Wynne. Stay where you are."

There was no doubting that the advice was eminently practical and wise, and there was little doubt, if any, in Harry's mind that the programme his companion laid down would be fulfilled to the letter if he returned to England. He made no answer, and the theme was allowed to drop. Morton stooped and patted him softly on the shoulder, and went away with an admirable delicacy into the open air.

The theme was buried, but its ghost walked in broad daylight. Morton turned cynic in his speech, and railed against the world. The worthlessness of reputation became a favourite theme with him.

"If I were wrongfully suspected and proscribed as you have been," he said, "I believe I should be tempted to turn adventurer. I'd take it out of the beggars somehow. It should go hard if I didn't better the things they brought against me."

This, as a mere explosion of sympathetic wrath, was passable. Harry had no dream of its being anything more than that, and so let it go by without response. Morton let the seed lie, but he had no idea on how stony a ground it had fallen. Even his most friendly sympathiser could hardly deny that Harry Wynne had been a fool, but a conscious temptation to dishonour had never so much as presented itself to

him. He was honest to the bone, and could no more help it than he could help being six feet high. The subtle Morton plied all the tools of his agriculture, threw his seed broadcast, and watched for signs of growth. None came.

He was extremely open and confidential, as he could very well afford to be, since he carefully eliminated all truth from the statements he made concerning himself. He described familiarly that airy Kekewich in Cheshire which Harry Wynne could not remember to have heard of. Harry grew intimate with the place, and with its inhabitants. He made acquaintance with the excellent Morton senior, a model country squire, now lying in the churchyard of quiet Kekewich by the side of his admirable wife. The narrator could only just remember his mother, and their common early orphanage was a bond between the historian and the listener. All this time his devotion to his suffering comrade was really surprising. He manufactured a rough but stalwart crutch, by the aid of which in a week or two Harry began to get about again. He drew his comrade out in the long dull days, and found a hundred devices for passing the time. He marked a square of the old newspaper for a draught board, and they played on it with gold and silver coins. He introduced another amusement which Harry found attractive. He was a remarkable penman, and could imitate the signatures of scores of eminent people. He set his companion to work at this, and in that way they wiled away many an hour which would otherwise have been listless and unoccupied. Napoleon's tremendous

autograph, Captain Marryat's copper-plate signature, Carlyle's grim crabbed fist, Byron's sprawl, and Dickens's self-proclamatory flourish, these and countless others appeared upon paper at the bidding of Mr. Morton's skilful fingers. The invalid's fancy was quite enchanted by this new art. He pursued it vigorously, and to his own astonishment discovered that he had great aptitude for it. Ronald Morton began to have hopes of his pupil, and if he could but once have broken through that unconscious hedge of natural honesty, would have congratulated himself most highly.

He wanted a gentleman for his purposes, and was judge enough of what he wanted to know that he had found it in the youngest representative of the house of Bridgebourne. The boy had an undeniable air of distinction, and it was a pity to waste such material as he owned on a career of honesty. It was a pity too that the look of honour that he wore should have been actually accompanied by the real thing. To disarm suspicion is the rogue's best game, and Mr. Morton himself was always conscious of a little difficulty in it. Harry Wynne would have found his own ingratiating airs superfluous.

When the two companions got to imitating each other's signatures, Morton grew facetious about the business values of the art he taught. Harry met his jests with an honest laugh, which never failed to disconcert him, though he always hid his discomfiture. They had been together nearly a month before Harry's stolid, stupid honour finally blunted such implements of moral agriculture as Morton dared to

bring to bear upon him. Morton gave him up at last, seeing clearly that there was no hope of a confederacy between them.

In the meantime war and the rumours of war were thickening about them, though lying off the one main road of the country, they saw nothing. Morton had already had enough of warlike experiences to last him for a lifetime, and was eager to find a safer hiding place. He talked of pushing across country to Dalmatia, and induced Harry to give him a half promise of companionship. The sprained leg still made movement painful, but its uses were rapidly returning, and in a day or two he hoped to be quite himself again.

They woke up one morning to a scene of great excitement. The surviving score of villagers were wild with joy at the arrival of a handful of Cossacks, who naturally and wisely proclaimed themselves the advance guard of the main body, though as a matter of fact they were playing the rashest roving game, and had no supports within seventy miles. Gourko's cavalry was rather fond of this sort of knight-errantry, and perhaps found it easier and safer to practise in a country which has but one road in it than it would be in any more civilised land. There was not a woman left in the village, nor a child ; but the residue of the inhabitants turned out in clumsy festal style, their great bearskin hats ornamented with ribbons, and cockades of rags pinned to their sheepskin breasts. The new arrivals ate and drank of their best, and bounced and swaggered as only this kind of military adventurer can bounce and swagger. Overwhelming

forces were close behind them, the whole country was in their hands. Suleiman had been swept away at the Shipka ; a hundred thousand of their men were massed at Teliche ; the war was practically and gloriously over. Bulgaria was free of the Turkish yoke, the treaty of peace would be signed in a fortnight, and the little Father was coming down the road in peaceful, glorious military procession in a day or two. Every Balkan villager heard these fine tidings at one time or other during the war, and most of them lived to wish that the news had come later and when it was nearer fulfilment.

Harry and Mr. Ronald Morton were too wise in their generation to say anything of the Circassian company in which one of them had arrived. They accepted the chances of war, which like poverty makes one acquainted with strange bedfellows, and gave the arrivals a cordial welcome. The lieutenant in command, being pretty sick of a seven weeks' diet of black bread, onions, and dirty water, fell on to Morton's potted luxuries with gusto, and vowed himself delighted to have met so charming and hospitable a companion. Mr. Morton had provisioned himself as if for a siege of long duration, but the Cossack lieutenant's appetite was abnormal, and made visible inroads on his stores. The brandy and tobacco gave him supreme contentment, and when the meal was crowned with coffee, he declared himself in Paradise. He complimented the two English gentlemen on their courage in looking so closely at war without the combatant's interest or compulsion, and Morton, whilst accepting his compliments, swore inwardly to

have seen the last of it. He would mount and ride to-morrow for Zara, where sweet peace reigned, and the detective forces of Paris, London, and Vienna, were alike unknown.

The day of rejoicing was wound up over a huge flaming pannikin of burned rum, to which the village world at large was invited. Sentries were posted, and the village went to sleep a little sounder than usual perhaps. The densest dark of night was over, and the first pale gray of dawn was in the air when a sudden clatter of horse hoofs in the street awoke Harry and his companion.

"What's that?" said Harry, stirring on his couch of rugs and skins.

"The Cossacks are off," said Morton. "I never believed their vapouring. The Turks are in force close by."

"We'll see them away anyhow," said Harry. "That lieutenant's a jovial bird, but unless his head is lined with cast-iron he carries a headache with him."

The inside of the hut was in dense darkness. The two arose, groping for their jackets which they had thrown off before going to sleep. Morton dragged the door open, and the village street showed dimly with half-a-dozen mounted figures in it thronging before the door. The two passed through into the gray dawn, and at that second there was a crackling roar of noise, a sudden belching of red light a hundred yards away, and Harry felt a vivid sting, followed by a strange numbness in his shoulder. Morton screamed and threw both arms into the air. He spun round

two or three times with his hands writhing above his head, and fell back through the doorway of the hut. Harry, vainly striving to seize him, followed. There were quick recurrences of light and darkness in his eyes with every pulsation of the blood, a curious painless stupor fell on him, and he dropped on the body of his companion. The sound of firing reached his ears again, and the mad clatter of hoofs which had answered to the first, died off into the distance. With that he lost all consciousness of his surroundings, and lay like a stone for an hour;

CHAPTER XII.

MR. HOGAN, M.D., was getting the loveliest practice in gunshot wounds, and was in a state of supreme contentment over half-a-dozen Cossacks, when a Turkish regular plucked him by the sleeve and pointed to the open doorway of a hut in the village street.

“Wan thing at a toime, and that done well, is a very good rule as many can tell,” quoted Mr. Hogan, serenely ; but the swarthy little man insisted, and the medico rose from his knees and followed. “Begad !” he broke out, “they’re English, the pair of ’em. Blackbeard’s business is over, and it’s a pity, for he’s a foine loikely-looking fellow. There’s life in the other chap, and whilst there’s life there’s hope they say. Let’s have a look at him. Why, you’re only a boy, me child ! Poor lad ! ‘ What brings ye out at this kind o’ foolery ? ”

He busied himself with skilful hands about the wound.

“’Tis ugly, but it might have been uglier. An

inch makes all the difference. An inch and a half lower down and somebody would have gone into mourning. Ye'll do for a while now. I'll get back to my Cossacks. There's nothing to be done for Blackbeard, poor chap."

He held Morton's hand in his own for a second and then dropped it and turned away, saddened whilst he might have counted three, and then brisk and alert again.

The daylight grew broader, and a slanting ray of sunshine fell upon the feet both of the quick and the dead as they lay side by side. It climbed higher and higher, touched the knees, the waist, and at last shone full into the wounded man's eyes. He woke from his swoon with a groan, and turning saw Morton lying close beside him, and knew at a glance that he was dead. His wide-open eyes were fixed and glassy, and he stared as if he saw some dreadful thing.

Harry lay regarding him for a full minute. He himself was conscious of no great pain, but the dead man's face was like a prophecy to him.

"It's all over," he said to himself. "This is the end of it all."

A new faintness crept over him, and he took it for the coming of death. He had carried Inthia's letter in his inner pocket ever since he had received it. His thoughts turned to it and to her. He groped for it feebly with a last farewell in his heart. He would die with Inthia's letter in his hand, if he died in the act of getting it. In his feverish struggles he discovered that his left arm and his breast were bandaged. He wondered at this for a moment, but gave it no further

thought. Trying to force his uninjured right hand beneath the bandage, he discovered that the jacket he wore was not his own, and a single glance at the dead man beside him told him that in the hurry and the darkness each had seized the other's garment. Morton lay on his right, and he could stretch a hand across his body. He struggled with a vigour which would have shown an onlooker how far away from death he really was, but he had no thought in his own mind except of a final farewell. He succeeded in seizing the letter, which lay alone, and drawing it from its hiding place he tried to raise it to his lips. His movements had disarranged the bandage and brought on a new flow of blood. He sank dizzily back into unconsciousness, and the letter dropped from his hand.

Later on, he had a dreamlike knowledge of voices, motion, and the open air, but this faded, and for a week he knew nothing of the world. The first thing he woke to was a blue sky, with fanciful figures on it, which dazzled and darkened into singular colours, but always kept the same pattern. He was dimly interested in this phenomenon. He had never seen a sky like that before and was feebly tempted to laugh at it. In the very fact of that humorous perception he fell asleep. When he woke to consciousness again somebody was feeding him. There was a yellow glow of lamplight in the room. He knew it for lamplight though he could not see its source ; but the same absurd blue sky with arabesque figures on it of various colours still winked at him, and dazzled out of darkness into light with a regular pulsation.

He was sleepily bent once more on laughter when his eyes cleared. The blue sky became a blue distempered wall, and the strange arabesque of dark and light resolved itself into a vulgar Bulgarian mural decoration.

"He'll dew, Hogan!" said a voice. The valiant children of Erin were everywhere.

"Why wouldn't he?" another voice responded. "He's as lean as a rat, but he's forty inches round the chest, and as hard as a nail from top to toe. He's a noble constitution, and he's taken it as if it was mother's milk. Poor Wynne was nearly as fine a fellow. 'Twas a sad end for the poor lad."

The patient listened in a vague wonder. He seemed to know nothing and to care for nothing, and yet it was strange that they should speak of him as dead. The spoon came with a slow regularity to his lips, and trickled warm beef-tea between them. Why should they feed him if he were dead? He had a feeble desire to laugh again at this ridiculous query.

"Me gad! Hogan," said the first voice, "if you and me had run away from our debts we'd hardly have run out here."

"It's excellent practice," returned the other, solemnly, "but ye can't help thinking sometimes. There's not a spot o' whisky within five hundred moiles."

Then the patient went to sleep, having given no sign of being awake beyond his absorption of the nourishment offered him. He knew nothing of the lapse of time, and it seemed natural and in the

ordinary course of things that the same voices should sound in his ear again. He opened his eyes, and saw a bearded man in a fez, bending over him. He had never before beheld him, but he associated him with the floating flavour of rum and tobacco which had touched the atmosphere of every conscious moment since he had received his wound.

"Come, young gentleman," said the bearded man; "ye're beginning to pick up again. That was a glance of intelligence, Dick. What's he saying?"

Hogan leaned over. The pale lips shaped a word.

"Morton? Morton. That's all right, me boy. We know who y'are. The papers are all right. They'll be taken proper care of, and you'll get them when the time comes. Ye'll just take this,"—proffering a glass to his lips—"and get to sleep again."

Some dim memory of the exchange of garments floated into Harry's mind, and he guessed that his identity was confused with that of his dead companion. He could explain nothing now, and for the moment the error did not matter.

Next day he was a little stronger, but not strong enough to talk above a whisper, and even then a mere word or two cost him so much effort that the doctor waved a hand for silence, and stole away on tiptoe. He heard himself spoken of as Morton, and was constantly addressed by that name. Once, in his hearing, the two doctors talked of poor young Wynne, and the tragic ending of his trivial scrape. His mind began to work more clearly, and he understood that the mere change of garments had for the moment cost him his identity. Then he began to

think further, and to ask himself if it were worth while to disturb that arrangement. Here was an end of Harry Wynne, his troubles and disgraces. There was no more hope for him, no going back again no chance of offering an unspotted name to Inthia. He made no definite resolution. He could not as yet have denied the general supposition, even if he would ; and as the hours went by and in his waking moments he revolved things in his mind, he grew more and more certain that he did not desire to do so.

He heard, while he was in this state of doubt, that the news of the death of "poor young Wynne" as everybody called him, had been wired home by the special correspondent of a great London daily, and he began to ask himself whether he could anyhow have found a more fortunate ending to his troubles. As for Inthia, she was never out of his thoughts, but she was utterly beyond his reach. She would grieve, but she would grow reconciled in time. She would marry Humphrey Frost, and be wealthy and distinguished and in time happy. It was hard to think it, but the conviction forced itself more and more upon his mind. The chance of self-effacement thus thrust upon him was not lightly to be thrown away. Even honour seemed to call him to it. What right had he to hold Inthia to a fruitless bargain, to block up her way of life with his own miseries and misfortunes ?

In the first day of real convalescence the problem solved itself. He allowed himself to be addressed as Morton, and answered consciously to the name,

There was no going back from it now. Harry Wynne was dead and done with, and buried in the Balkan wilds; but there was a living, eager-hearted and honourable youngster left behind him who had accepted the *alias* and personality of one of the most brilliant criminals in Europe.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the May of the year 1882 the London newspapers made a tremendous boom about the arrival in town of that intrepid and distinguished Asiatic explorer Mr. Ronald Morton. Some of the journals gave biographies of the celebrity, but were uncertain as to his early days. They were agreed that he had narrowly escaped death in the first skirmish he had witnessed in the Russo-Turkish war, that after his recovery from his wound he had done brilliant service as a special correspondent, and that, at the close of the campaign, he had set out upon a journey of amazing difficulty and danger. That fascinating volume, *A Ride from the Caspian to the Pacific*, told the rest of Mr. Ronald Morton's experiences. The returned wanderer was the hero of the hour, and his table was covered daily with bushels of letters and cards of invitation from distinguished and undistinguished people.

If the celebrated traveller had chosen to go into society and to get his lionizing over, it might have

been with him as it is with so many others who become the objects of the world's amiable caprices. He might have had his month or six weeks of wonder and adulation, and have got it over, falling back into the unnoticeable crowd. But the obstinate privacy in which he veiled himself gave a zest to curiosity and the whole town was agog at him.

He had two rooms at the Westminster Hotel, and received nobody. His secretary opened for him and assorted the enormous correspondence which poured in daily, and a lithographed form, beginning with "Mr. Ronald Morton regrets," did duty for hundreds of answers.

One morning his secretary laid before him, with a respectful grin a curious document.

"This came this morning, sir. It is very peculiar, and I thought you might like to see it."

"Willie, we have missed you," ran the curious epistle. "One little pig went to market, and one little pig stayed at home, but where's my share? Will you walk into my parlour? G. C. G."

The celebrated traveller smiled, and dropped the letter.

"Some madman," he said lightly.

"Perhaps an error, sir, in enveloping letters," suggested the secretary. "It looks as if it were addressed to an intimate acquaintance."

"Well, yes," the traveller allowed. "It has that air."

The curious epistle went into the fire, with a hundred or two others, but next morning the secretary primly crumpling his lips from a smile, laid before his employer a second letter in the same handwriting.

"*Won't* you walk into my parlour, William? Gilead. Balm of Gilead. Might turn vitriolic."

Nothing doubting as yet that the bruit about his name had attracted the attention of some eccentric madman, the distinguished traveller confided this letter also to the flames. It was one of those lovely days in late spring when London casts off the mantle of ugliness it wears for nine-tenths of the year and clothes itself in beauty. The returned wanderer had nothing to do, knew nobody, and was alone in the midst of his fame. The thought of the sunlit green of the parks drew him with a pleasing compulsion, and he dressed for the open air. The light seam of a scar which ran transversely from the right side of the forehead to the left cheek made his sun-burned face remarkable without greatly disfiguring it, and the frank blue gray of his eyes contrasted strongly with the dark hue of his skin. The slim figure of youth had set and broadened and thickened through a life of rare toil and purity, and a crisp, full beard and heavy moustache lent a manly dignity to his face. He was attired like any other British gentleman, but his costume offered the thinnest of disguises. The dullest eye might see in him the signs of wild travel and perilous adventure.

He was walking along the corridor, drawing a glove over one sunburned hand as he went, when a spare, bearded man threw a door open, and came out with so unguarded a vivacity that in half a second he and the great traveller were mingled in what looked like the fondest of embraces.

"Oi beg your pardon," said the slight man, recover-

ing the perpendicular, and bowing with an overflowing politeness. "I saw ye too late to save meself."

"Hogan, old man," said the traveller.

"Upon me word," returned the other, scrutinizing him, "ye have the advantage of me."

"I dare say I've changed. It's seven years since you pulled me out of the grave, Hogan. Take another look. Don't you remember me?"

"Begad!" cried the doctor, "'tis Morton!" And there ensued a mighty handshaking. "Come into my room. I've a consulting chamber here. I'd just got my morning's work over and was away to see my patients. But they can wait. 'Twas no wonder I did not know you. What a mass of a man ye've grown! What's your chest measurement now? Ye'll have a drink now, won't ye? Upon me soul, I'm delighted to meet ye. I've read your book. Why didn't ye tell me you were goin'? I'd have given a leg to be with ye. When I came to that adventure with the old Khan I thought I'd die with laughing. What's your beverage? Put a name to it. Really, upon me soul now, I *am* delighted."

The returned wanderer stood smiling down on him; holding both his hands, and every now and then giving them a solid little shake.

"You're looking prosperous, Hogan."

"Pros'prou, me boy," returned the doctor, in a whisper of almost awe-stricken secrecy. "I'm a world's wander to meself when I think about it. 'Twas the gunshot practice did it all. Oi was staying with a friend in the country, and as good luck would

have it a burglar put a load o' lead into Sir Miles Sinclair. D'ye know 'm? A foine old English gentleman, one of the olden toime. Ball traversed the shoulder, and lodged behind the shoulder-blade. I whipped it out with a penknife. Simplest operation in the world. Sir Miles swore I was the Napoleon of surgery, and called me in a month later to attend her ladyship. I've half the aristocracy now, and no word of a lie about it. The very minute I ran into ye I was off to see Lady McCorquodale, sister of Lord Hounes, and the daughter of the Earl of Bridgebourne. She's stayin' at his lordship's house in Eccleston Square, and my broom's waiting at the door this minute."

The distinguished traveller's heart leapt at these familiar names. He longed to ask questions, but gave no sign.

"Her leedyship was speakin' about ye," Hogan pursued, "only yesterday. Ye're the talk of London. I told her that I'd had the good luck to pull ye through, and I was ass enough to forget that she was poor young Wynne's great-aunt, and I spoke about the boy being killed in the same scrimmage. The old lady said nothing, but Miss Grey, that's a kind of niece to her, gave me a warning glance, and after that I had the good taste to hold my tongue, and to change the subject. Everybody says ye're hiding yourself. Why don't ye go into society?"

"I don't know," said the traveller, laughing rather joylessly. "Perhaps I have been out of society so long that I might feel a little ill at ease and un-at-home in it."

"That's trew too," said Hogan gravely, and rang the bell. "We'll have just a pint of Monopole

and a touch of angostura. Now ye can't refuse me. I prescribe it. I know your constitution from of old, and I know what's good for ye. Ye won't think me shabby in ordering a point?" said the good Celt. "A point between two is an excellent thing of a morning, but a quart's too much. There's always duns and old chums, and that sort o' people, wantin' money of me, and if I had my share of a full bottle I'd be too generous."

The wanderer drank his wine sadly, though he made no show of sadness. He would have liked to question Hogan about Lady McCorquodale and her household, but he was unused to pretences, and before he had found a subterfuge the small bottle was empty, and the doctor was on his feet prepared to go.

"Ye'll dine with me to-noight?" said Hogan. "Won't ye now? We'll have a talk about old times, and I'll beat up one or two of the old boys. Seven sharp. Don't fail me now. Ye'll come, won't ye?"

"Let us dine alone to-night, Hogan," said the traveller. "We shall have plenty to talk about, and I don't care about a crowd."

It was agreed to, and they parted. The distinguished wanderer sauntered into the park, thinking of conversational devices by means of which he might lure on Hogan to talk of his patient and her companion. Inthia was Miss Grey still, it seemed, and had not married Humphrey Frost and his millions after all. He did not flatter himself that he knew much of the great world of human nature. He had elected to immerse himself in savage solitudes, and

had given himself but little opportunity for study of the human heart. He was faithful to his old remembrances, but questioning himself he found a reason for it. In long, lonely marches and companionless night bivouacs Inthia had been the constant comrade of his thoughts, and he had given her no rival. If he had mixed with the world things might have gone differently, and she had remained in it. Then again she had thought him dead this seven years. A girl of her position, her beauty, and prospective wealth could never be without suitors, and he thought it strange that she had not married long ago. He dismissed, as a sort of coxcombry, the thought which would intrude itself, that she had been faithful to his memory all these years.

He had so long since resigned her, and had so completely obliterated himself that these thoughts were pensive rather than painful. The boyish ardour of desire had faded and he was contented to be alone. But none the less was she a saint to him, an object of worship, the embodiment of all that was true and pure and good and beautiful in womankind.

Dinner-time came, and he was punctual to the hour. He played his conversational wiles, deliberately prepared, on Hogan.

"Poor young Wynne" he, said, "was in love with your patient's ward, I fancy."

"And that's no wonder," Hogan answered, "though she could have been no more than a child when he knew her. She's not more than four-and-twenty now, and to my mind she's just the loveliest woman in London."

Hogan's companion knew nothing of that master-

piece of fiction, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, but without its guiding aid he recognized Beauty's Dog in Hogan, M.D. Beauty's Dog excites no jealousy in the mind of any lover, and when Hogan chanted Inthia's praises Harry Wynne listened in grave and tender assent. A crowd of Hogans might have worshipped her, and have awakened no sentiment except one of acquiescence in his mind.

"I wasn't braggin'," said Hogan, "but I mentioned to her ladyship that I'd met ye this morning, and that you were going to dine with me this evening."

The excellent Hogan had indeed carried that intelligence everywhere. It was a feather of such exceptional brilliancy in his cap that it made quite a personage of him. That distinguished Ronald Morton, after whom the whole of London was running in vain, was his own private and particular prey. Dukes and earls, duchesses and ladies of inferior title smothered him with invitations, and he declined them all to sit over a bottle of simple claret and a plain chop with an old chum.

"She's a fine stately old lady," continued Hogan, naturally unconscious of his hearer's superior knowledge of his theme, "and I suppose she's always been a bit inclined to be hard about the poor boy that ran away, but when she learned that I'd just come hot from the man that was shot down by the side of 'm, she got out her handkerchief, the poor old dame, and wiped her glasses."

Hogan blew his nose and his eyelids grew a little red.

"I tell ye," he said, defiantly, "I was affected, and when her ladyship asked me to use my best influences

to bring you up to Lord Hounes's house to have a talk with her I promised I'd do my best."

This was more than the returned exile had bargained for. There lay there a danger of detection, and he stammered some lame excuse.

"Unused to the society of ladies. What should I do in a drawing-room?"

"Me dear fellow!" cried Hogan. "What are ye talkin' about? Ye'd have all the girls at your feet, like a Sultan. Not that that matters, for ye're mightily changed since the old days at Tashkesen if ye've grown feather-headed. But now really ye can't refuse. Here's an old lady that wants news of the last days of her great-nephew, and a young one that wants to hear about her dead sweetheart. Your own chum too, Morton. Ye can't find it in your heart to say no. They live just as quiet as mice, and ye're bound to like them. Come up with me to-morrow morning when I pay my visit. Ye needn't stay twenty minutes, and ye'll be doing me a personal service."

It was so slight and natural a thing to ask, and so easy to accede to, that the wanderer was troubled. He took refuge in a social fib, and being unused to that sort of exercise, boggled over it wofully.

"Not to-morrow. I am too busy."

"Ah, well!" said hearty Hogan, "there's no trouble about to-morrow. We'll go up the next day, and to-morrow I'll tell them that ye're coming."

"No, no," cried Harry. "Tell them nothing of the sort. I—I would rather not meet anybody whilst I'm in town."

"What am I to tell them at all?" Hogan demanded. "That ye won't come and exchange a word with two ladies that loved an old comrade that was shot down at the side o' ye? It's not like ye, Morton! Ye can't refuse them."

Hogan had been so sure of his friend's consent beforehand that he had actually pledged himself to bring him, and had even indulged in some harmless flourishes about the intimacy of his friendship with the great traveller and his influence over him, so that the refusal was doubly a disappointment.

"I'll think of it," said Harry. "We'll speak of it later on. I don't like to refuse you, Hogan. Leave it there for a little while."

When the two parted for the night Harry Wynne set a candle on either side his looking-glass, and sitting down stared steadily at his own reflection for a long time. He tried to recall to memory the slim shoulders and the beardless ingenuous face of youth, but he failed signally. He could not tell how far he had changed, but the scar, the tanned complexion, and the beard must, he thought, afford him an almost impenetrable disguise. He pondered long as to whether he dare risk the experiment of a visit, and at the thought of meeting Inthia again his heart sounded a mad alarm. It had been steadier a hundred times when he had held his life in his hand, and had expected at every second to have it wrested from him. He went to bed half determined that he would dare the risk, but he woke up in the morning animated by less valorous fancies. His life of late years had been a rare school for rapidity and firmness of

decision. His vacillation worried him, and he told himself that he was growing effeminate in London, and began to long for his wilds again.

Hogan, having once promised the famous traveller to Lady McCorquodale, was relentless in pursuit of his game. He was in and out of Wynne's chambers a dozen times a day, and at last he quite unwittingly clinched the nail of argument.

"It's no use going to-morrow," said Hogan, "because Miss Grey's going into the country, and 'tis she I specially want to see you."

Harry discovered precipitately that to-morrow was the one day in the year that would suit him. He felt that he could encounter Lord Hounes and Lady McCorquodale without fear of recognition, and with no temptation to self-betrayal. The more he feared to meet Inthia the stronger grew his desire, and the more he came to wish the meeting, the more he feared.

"The broom's at the door," Hogan announced, thrusting his head into Wynne's sitting-room at noon next day. "We're due already, but I've been kept waiting by a patient."

Time had not often seemed to go so swiftly as it passed on that rapid little journey. Harry's heart was beating fast when Hogan's carriage pulled up before the door of the house in Eccleston Square, and his mouth and lips were dry. If he could have had his choice he would sooner have scaled a battery with a determined enemy behind it than have mounted the innocent flight of steps before him. But he was in for the business now, and must needs stiffen his nerves and go through with it.

Almost before he knew it, Hogan's voice, in oiliest suave medical tone, was introducing him.

"Me friend, Mr. Ronald Morton, the world-famous Asiatic explorer, Lady McCorquodale. Mr. Morton, Lord Hounes."

Lord Hounes, dried and sour, and withered to an extraordinary degree, bowed with his own frosty dignity, and waved a hand towards a wonderful old figure in an armchair.

"My father, the Earl of Bridgebourne."

The Earl of Bridgebourne had never been a big man physically, but in the extreme old age to which he had lived he seemed to have shrunk away to nothing. The skin clung tightly to his withered old temples as if it had grown too small for the skull. The toothless mouth fell in, and the nose and chin peaked beyond it, threatening to meet. Not a nerve or a muscle of his face seemed to have motion in it, and only his eyes were alive. They had grown amazingly large and brilliant, like a bird's.

The unknown visitor's heart fluttered with a sudden unexpected tenderness and pity. The stately old man had been kind to him when he was a lad, had patted his head and advised him, and on two or three memorable occasions had tipped him a five-pound note. It was wonderful to himself to notice how near and keen and fresh the past from which he had severed himself grew at that moment.

Lady McCorquodale's hair was white, and arranged in scanty bands. She was less majestic than of old. He thought she looked softened, gentler, and less

masculine. She had taken to spectacles, and looked shortsightedly at the visitor.

Harry took the seat that was offered him, and Lady McCorquodale began to question him.

"We understand from Dr. Hogan, Mr. Morton, that you are averse to society, and that during your brief stay in town you desire to be left alone as much as possible?" He bent his head in silence, but accompanied that gesture with a little deprecatory wave of both hands, which seemed to make light of the matter. "We are very sensible," her ladyship continued, "of the favour you do us in coming here. You knew poor Harry?"

The old lady's severe voice trembled. She had meant to put the question in her usual ceremonious fashion, and had introduced it solemnly enough, but it touched her heart when it came. The handsome, wrong-headed, foolish lad was dead, and being dead had long since been forgiven.

"I knew him, madam," the visitor answered simply, and waited for further questions.

"Where did you first meet him?" asked her ladyship.

"He went straight to the Byzance Hotel on the night of his arrival in Constantinople." He tried to avoid the lie direct, and hesitated from what his hearers took for shyness or long disuse of social habit. "We met there for an hour or two," he went on, forced to admit the situation frankly. "I believe he joined the Polish Legion, but nothing came of that, and he finally went up country with a Circassian officer."

"We heard," said her ladyship, interrupting him, "some confused story of his having saved an Englishman's life from the Circassians. Did you know of that?"

"It was Ronald Morton's life he saved."

The quaint form passed with the rest of the stranger's oddities.

"Your life?" cried the old lady trembling. "He risked his own?"

"I am sure," said the pretended Morton, shrugging his shoulders with an incomprehensible modesty, "that he never thought of that."

"He was brave," said the old lady. Her tremulous lips told more and more of pride and affection, and perhaps something of repentance. Harry had been very young when the members of all his house had turned their backs upon him, and had left him to his own fatal devices. She thought piteously, "If they had only been a little more generous!"

"Did he often speak to you of home?" Lord Hounes asked drily, "and of his own affairs?"

"I knew his reasons for leaving England. You must let me speak of this. I am persuaded—I know it as well as I know that I am sitting here—that he meant honourably all along, that rogues took advantage of his inexperience of the world, and gulled him."

"I have always said so," the old earl broke in with shrill and wavering pipe. "I have always said so. His uncle Percy maintained it to the day of his death. The boy was duped by rogues."

"We caused," said Lord Hounes, in his dry-as-

dust parliamentary tones, "we caused the strictest inquiry to be made into his way of life, and could discover nothing, absolutely nothing, which militated against his character."

"If he could have guessed," said the visitor, "that his family would have taken so much care to do him justice he would have stayed, and faced the hollow charge against him. An able counsel could have blown it to the winds in a minute."

"If I had not been certain," said the old earl in his trembling falsetto, "if I had not been certain of the boy's honour I would never have paid the debts he left behind him."

The visitor looked up, with a glance at once keen and troubled. There was a momentary hoarseness in his tone as he responded.

"I wish poor Wynne could have known. It lay upon his mind like lead."

"He seems to have made you his confidant," said Lady McCorquodale.

"I do not think," Harry answered, "that he had a secret from me."

A ring at the outer bell and the opening of the outer door had passed unnoticed, but at this instant a figure entered the room and brought him unconsciously to his feet.

"Inthia!" cried the old lady. "I thought you were forty miles away."

"Roberts was mistaken as to the time of the train," she answered. "We were twenty minutes late. I called on Lady Mabel as I drove home."

"This is Mr. Morton, my dear," said Lady McCor-

quodale. "The great traveller in Asia, whose book you have been reading. Mr. Morton was with poor Harry when he died. My niece, Miss Grey, Mr. Morton."

The girl looked gravely and sweetly up at him, and their eyes met. In a second—in less than a second, in a flash of time—her calm expression changed to one of unutterable bewilderment. She had no eyes for the man who actually stood before her, bearded, massive, sun-burned, and scarred. The face that met her gaze was Harry's, as she had seen him last. It was like a lightning flash for suddenness, and was gone as soon as there. The two stood eyeing each other strangely, and Lady McCorquodale, rising rapidly, took Inthia by the hand.

"Sit down, dear," she said tenderly, and whispered in a swift aside, "I startled you."

"No," said Inthia's eyes. She was herself again, but wondered still at the vision she had seen.

"My great-grandson," said the earl, "died like an Englishman, Mr. Morton."

The whole interview had weighed upon him from the first, and now that Inthia was here he felt it intolerable. He thought he had come with a pardonable pretence, but now he felt as if he were steeped in infamy. He could not speak without evading lies. If he had found the people of his blood as he had supposed he left them, cruelly indifferent and cold, his position would have been easier. But it hit him hard to know that they had been sensitive of his honour, and that in spite of appearances they had believed in him. He found it difficult too to sit by and give no sign

when a casual phrase informed him of Percy Seaforth's death. But for a strong and resolute repression the tears would have arisen to his eyes at that intelligence. The colonel had been like a father to him, and had stood next in his heart to Inthia.

He had a purpose in mind, and could not yet afford to betray himself. He felt that he must harden his heart, as Joseph had done before his brethren thousands of years ago, though like Joseph he would fain have gone out and wept.

CHAPTER XIV.

"BEGAD!" said Hogan, as he left the house at Harry's side, "ye're curiously shy, Morton. Upon me word now, ye were blushing and boggling like a school-girl. Ye weren't used to be like that when ye were more accustomed to the society of ladies, I'll go bail."

Harry forced a laugh. He was content to leave Hogan to his fancy, and was glad that he had lighted upon so natural a supposition. Hogan wanted to drive him back to the hotel, but Harry insisted on shaking hands then and there.

"I'm in want of exercise," he said. "London cramps me."

He strode away, and Hogan watched his massive figure as it went down the street. The medico was so full of pride in his friend that he could not refrain from playing him on the very coachman.

"D'ye know who that is, Harkett? That's the most famous man at this hour in London. That's Mr. Ronald Morton, the great Asiatic explorer."

"Him as rode on 'orseback from the Cahspian to the Pacific, sir?" said the coachman, waking to sudden

interest. "He looks as if he'd gone through something, sir. A splendid figure of a gentleman."

Harry strode solidly away, eager to be alone with his own thoughts. Almost before he knew it he found himself in Hyde Park, and there seating himself on a bench in a quiet corner he tried to pull his random wits together. For a while he could think nothing but Inthia. His pulses sang her name. The thought of her face filled his mind. Many a thousand times in his lonely wanderings he had tried to picture her as grown to womanhood, and had tried to anticipate the changes time would bring. He thought her now infinitely more beautiful than he had ever pictured her, or than she had been in her girlhood. He believed he read a hint of settled sorrow in her face, and he accused himself, as any honest man was bound to do. That young life ought to have gone unshadowed. He sat in a sort of dreamland, when the thought crossed him that his own boyish wickedness and folly had killed her lover, and had left a virgin heart widowed. He felt like an assassin. What right had he to rob her in that way? He had been a fool from start to finish, and had even misread the legend of sterling family pride which had stared him in the face. He ought to have known that a man in the position of Lord Bridgebourne would not allow the family honour to be tarnished for the sake of a few thousand pounds. The hard old man had paid his debts when he supposed him dead, and would have done at least as much to prevent the open shame of his appearance in the dock.

Sitting there unobserved he drew from his pocket

a small leather wallet, dark and polished with long use. It contained but a single sheet of paper—Inthia's last letter. He knew its words by heart, and had so known them any time this seven years, but he read the lines again with a sort of reverence. He had always heard the girl's impetuous and vivacious voice in the words, but now the woman's graver and gentler tones seemed to repeat them with a solemn surety.

He had, in the course of the morning, felt so strangely moved to betray himself that he had been on the edge of doing it half-a-dozen times. Sitting retired in his little corner solitude, he half resolved to let his alias go. He could repay Lord Bridgebourne easily, and there lay his plain, honest duty. He had made an honourable and famous name, and felt that the indiscretion of his youth was wiped so clean away that no man would care to bring it up against him. His self-effacement, which had once looked like an act of heroism, seemed now only like one more folly added to the list.

His mind swung to and fro like a pendulum. He would and he would not. His mood of indecision was all the less tolerable to him because of his accustomed way of life, full of the rapidest and most daring decision. He had made up no final mind upon the matter, when he rose to walk back to his hotel. There was a block at a crossing of the roads, and looking up he saw Lady McCorquodale and Inthia seated behind her ladyship's black-liveried coachman. They bowed to him, and he raised his hat in answer, reading or fancying that he read, a renewal of the first inquiry in Inthia's eyes. If she should recognize him she could think of him only as

a coward hiding under an alias from the reproach he dared not face.

His thoughts were with him all day and through the greater part of the night. He awoke restless and unrefreshed, and walked out for an early morning swim in the Serpentine, still debating the one question by the way. It was unsettled when he returned, and looked likely to remain unsettled.

As he neared the hotel on his return he observed for the third or fourth time within the last day or two a curious figure on the pavement at the door—a man in an elegant little go-cart of finished construction, which was impelled and guided by the cripple's own hands. The man wore a skull cap of dark blue velvet, which was in striking contrast with the dreadful pallor of his face. His skin was colourless, and of a hard smooth texture, like white paper. His eyes were sunken, and of a cold dead porcelain blue. His face was so clean shaven that it looked innocent of the razor, but the chin was decorated by a little goat tuft, and whenever the man was not occupied in wheeling himself about he sat caressing this tuft with his blanched fingers, with a stiff, set smile, as if he were meditating mischief to somebody. The robust giant had never passed this ruined creature without a twinge of pity, which had yet a trace of repulsion in it. Constant suffering might well have given birth to that soulless grimace, and it was hard that a healthy man whose every movement was a bodily pleasure should punish suffering even in his thoughts.

Behind the man this morning stood a tall and handsome girl of a marked American type, slender and

insolent. She had a hand upon the back rail of the go-cart near the invalid's head, and was bending over him, when Harry first caught sight of them.

The hall porter was standing on the steps of the hotel, and was in conversation with them. Harry heard distinctly the name of Ronald Morton, and as he passed through the doorway was aware of whispers behind him. The reflection in the glass doors showed him the group outside, the invalid pushing his chair forward, the girl peering eagerly over his head, the hall porter nodding backwards and sideways, as who should say "There goes the man you spoke of." Harry was constantly receiving some such evidence as this scene afforded him of the interest he excited in the public mind. He passed indoors and in a moment had forgotten the episode completely.

The invalid set his chair in motion, gliding smoothly over the level pavement. The girl walked slowly at his side, keeping pace with him.

"Gilead," she said, looking down upon him, "that ain't the man."

"What?" the other snapped, turning his eyes upon her.

"It ain't the man," the girl repeated, with a drawling nasal decision. "Willie was no broader round the shoulders than I am. You could get three men like Willie into that man's waistcoat."

"You always were a mule, Priscilla," the cripple answered, "and you always will be. You'd have been a mule if you'd been born to trousers, but being feminine you're fixed up proper."

"Mule or no mule," the girl hummed through her

pretty little nose, "that ain't the man. D'ye think *I* don't know Willie Reid?"

"D'ye think *I* don't know him?" snarled the man in the go-cart. "Don't men at his age thicken in the figure? He wasn't over five-and-twenty. What's to prevent his thickening in the figure? I'll tell you what it is, Priscilla—you make me mad."

"I don't care how mad I make you," the girl hummed back at him with a tranquil, settled obstinacy, "that ain't the man."

"Parrot!" said the invalid, and shot himself wrathfully forward at a great pace. The girl walked calmly on, and by and by he came circling back again, made a tour round her and settled into his old place "I'll know if he's the man or not," he said; "I'll put Heaton on to him."

Unconscious of the peculiar interest he excited, Harry breakfasted and settled himself to work at the preface his publishers had asked for a projected popular edition of his book. A waiter announced a gentleman to see him. For a while he was indisposed to receive a stranger. He had been besieged by curious impertinents of the lion-hunting tribes, and had made his orders imperative against their admission. But this particular visitor clung tenaciously to his point, and was at last admitted. He was gray, and responsible in aspect, and might have been an eminently respectable solicitor by his looks.

"My instructions are, sir," he said, "to place this letter and this packet in your own hands. You are Mr. Ronald Morton?"

"I am Ronald Morton."

The gray, responsible man gravely handed him a sealed packet and a letter, and at once took up his hat to withdraw.

"Stay," said Harry. "There may be an answer."

"I was instructed to the contrary," said the respectable stranger, and with that and a quiet "Good morning," he left the room.

Harry broke the seal of the letter, and found Messrs. Coutts and Co. in correspondence with Mr. Ronald Morton. On the 3rd March, 1875, he was informed that he had, on the introduction of a respected client, made a deposit of seven hundred and fifty pounds, and a sealed parcel. With the exception of ten pounds twelve shillings and sixpence the whole sum deposited had been withdrawn a fortnight later, though Mr. Morton had distinctly understood that his balance was at no time to stand at less than five hundred pounds. The bankers' letters calling his attention to this fact had been returned from the address left with them, and learning that Mr. Ronald Morton had returned to London they begged at once to place the sealed packet and a draft for the balance of his account in his hands, and to close correspondence.

An air of cold business offence breathed through this epistle, and it was evident that the bankers were aggrieved at their client's neglect and his contravention of their rules.

"But what to do with this confounded packet?" the recipient asked himself. "It doesn't belong to me. Poor Morton used to say that he hadn't a relative in the world. The ordnance map shows no Kekewich

in Cheshire. I have inherited a mystery, and I must walk out of it by the straightest road."

He was not eager to present himself to a solemn bank manager with the declaration that he had adopted an *alias*, and bankers were not wont to surrender valuables without being pretty sure of the identity of the persons to whom they handed them. Perhaps after all, he thought, he was troubling himself for nothing. The deposit might consist merely of confidential papers of no value to any one but the owner. He had at least the right to look and see.

So thought, so done. The packet revealed a mass of valuable bonds, and conspicuous on the top of it was the Imperial Eagle of Austria stamped on the issue of the Lottery Loan of 1854. The sheets lay close and solid, and he could form no notion of their value without a close inspection. The discovery staggered him, and added greatly to his perplexities. The only thing altogether clear to him was the fact that he could not keep them in his own hands. He had no more right to these valuables than any man who walked the street, but the question was how to give them back again.

He was still deliberating, marching solidly to and fro in his room, when two gentlemen below presented themselves to the hall porter, and offering their cards requested that they should be at once carried to Mr. Ronald Morton. The hall porter was extremely sorry, but Mr. Morton's orders were imperative. He was not to be disturbed. The visitors were suavely and smilingly convinced that if Mr. Morton knew their names he would at once receive them. The hall porter was

doggedly confident of the opposite and declined to disobey the unqualified orders he had received. The visitors appealed to the hotel manager, explained that their business was of the utmost importance to Mr. Morton himself, and declared that Mr. Morton would be extremely angry if he learned they had been sent away. On this the manager himself ascended to Mr. Morton's rooms, and with a little flourish of apology set forth the reason of his intrusion. His guest took the visiting cards, and had no sooner glanced at them than he smiled with a curious expression.

"Quite right," he said. "Show the gentlemen up stairs." The manager retired.

"Mr. Herbert Whale, F.L.D.S. 'F.L.D.S.?' And Captain Peter Heaton. It will be interesting to meet that pair again, but what do they want with Ronald Morton? Poor Morton knew about them, and had no high opinion of them. But what brings them to see him? I'll vow that neither of them desires to see me."

A waiter ushered in the visitors, who advanced smiling, hat in hand, but stopped simultaneously, and glanced from Harry to each other with a look of sudden puzzlement.

"Mr. Ronald Morton?" said Captain Heaton, in a tone of somewhat puzzled inquiry.

"At your service, gentlemen," said Harry gravely. "The hotel manager was so certain of the importance of your business that you have no doubt something of a pressing nature to say to me."

Mr. Herbert Whale responded to this speech by

a slow, elaborate wink, and stepping on clumsy tip-toe to the door, opened it, peered out into the corridor, closed it and locked it. Having gone through this curious pantomime with a face expressive of the liveliest humour, he returned, and in a cheerful, confidential whisper, said, "How goes it, William?"

Harry's stare of amazement at this inquiry left Hump's smile fixed upon his face. It stayed there for some seconds, and then gradually faded to a look of almost abject vacuity.

"Have you got too proud to know an old pal?" he asked at length.

"You're labouring under some singular misconception, sir," said Harry.

"I can't say," said Heaton, interposing himself smoothly between them, "that the tone you take is altogether surprising. You have changed, but you have hardly changed so much as you seem to fancy."

Harry looked from one to the other, and for a moment deliberated.

"Shall I be candid with you, gentlemen?" he answered. "My first impulse was to put you to the door for a pair of impudent practical jokers. Perhaps however it may be best to listen to you. My time is valuable, and I shall be obliged if you will tell me, as shortly as you can, the nature of your business."

"Mr. Gilfoil has twice written to you since your arrival in London, and has received no answer."

"That is possible," said Harry. "Who is Mr. Gilfoil?"

Hump drove a facetious forefinger in the direction of his companion's waistcoat.

"He wants to know who Gilead is. Tell him, Heaton."

There was something so mirth-inspiring in his own fancies that Mr. Whale sitting with one end of his walking stick in either hand, rubbed it to and fro upon his legs in a subdued ecstasy of humorous enjoyment, and chuckled to himself.

"Is Mr. Gilfoil the anonymous gentleman who desired me a day or two ago to walk into his parlour?" Harry asked. He had come to the conclusion an hour ago that he had inherited a mystery. He thought it bade fair to turn out a very shady mystery, to say the least of it. The visit of Messrs. Hump and Heaton seemed at present to thicken it, but might end by clearing it.

"It is quite possible that he might adopt that playful form," said Heaton.

"Will you tell me why I am asked to walk into Mr. Gilead's parlour?"

"It is seven years," said Heaton, shrugging his shoulders with a smile, "since he had the pleasure of meeting you. He is afraid that you may have forgotten him, and he does not mean to be forgotten."

"Will you tell me why his affections flow so strongly my way?" asked Harry.

Hump seemed to find this inquiry altogether delicious. He grew scarlet in the face, and rubbed

his walking stick up and down his thighs more briskly than before. Heaton himself seemed to see a dawning humour in the situation. There was a laugh in his voice as he responded,

“Come now, wasn’t there a little account between Messrs. Gilfoil and Company and yourself left unsettled when you disappeared into Asia?”

“Was that so?” said Harry. “Will you tell me its nature and amount?”

Heaton’s smile creamed all over his face.

“Don’t you think we’ve had enough of this?” he asked. “It’s quite natural that you shouldn’t be eager to stump up, and really if you don’t want to know your old friends they won’t press themselves upon you. You don’t take into account,” he pursued, in a manner at once soothing and explanatory, “the change that has taken place in Gilead since his accident. He has grown morose and snappish. He has less patience than he used to have. Your seeming neglect of his letters has made him angry. Honestly, I know him better of late than you do, and he is even less disposed to be trifled with than he used to be. I won’t even say that he might not be dangerous.”

“Gilead might be dangerous,” said Harry, with a stolid face. “To me?” He tapped himself lightly on the chest as he spoke.

“You have seen a great deal, no doubt,” Heaton answered, “but let me tell you, you have not seen anything much worse than Gilead if he gets his back up. Your memory ought to tell you that.”

"We get no further, gentlemen," said Harry. "What, in plain English, does Mr. Gilfoil want?"

"In plain English, Mr. Gilfoil wants his share."

"And his fair share," interjected Hump. "And the Co. want their shares as well."

"His share of what?" asked Harry.

"His share of the property," said Heaton. His creaming smile had disappeared, and had given way to a look of repressed impatience.

"His share of what property?"

Heaton rose with a gesture of sudden anger, and took a step or two across the room.

"Look here," said Hump, rising also and approaching Harry. "You're spreading it too thick, young man. You want to pretend you haven't been in it all along. That cock won't fight. You say you're Ronald Morton, and that's quite good enough. We got your last letter from Bulgaria telling us you couldn't be back for six months. That's seven years ago, and now we've got you, William, you're not going to slip us again. Just you make up your mind to that."

The situation was growing interesting, and it was one of a kind that Harry Wynne felt himself more at home in than he had been in that of yesterday. But it came suddenly to an end in a manner he did not understand. The gallant captain stood half sly, half fascinated, with his eye upon the pile of bonds. The fingers of his right hand fumbled eagerly at a little gold pencil-case which dangled from his watch-chain. He shot the cuff of his shirt sleeve across the knuckles of his left hand and pencilled a hasty note upon it.

With that he turned swiftly, with an air of triumph and decision.

“Let me advise you,” he said, “not to carry your present game too far, Mr. William Reid. Understand that you are dealing with men who are accustomed to enforce their rights. We do full credit to your genius for shifts and dodges, but you will recollect that the rest of us are safe, and you are not. You may take what course you choose, and I do not pretend to say what time will be allowed you. But you will be troubled by no further visits from us, and any further negotiations will begin on your own side. Good-morning.”

He marched erect and soldier-like to the door, unlocked it, signalled to his companion, and went out, a monument of virtuous indignation. Half way down the stairs Hump tapped him on the shoulder with his walking stick.

“You broke off rather short, old sonny.”

Heaton cast a cautious glance about him, and saw that they were quite alone, then diving into his pocket produced a purse, and drew from it a folded scrap of paper. The paper was frayed at the edges, and he had to open it gingerly lest it should fall to pieces.

“One thousand pounds reward,” it ran, “will be paid to any person giving such information as will lead to the conviction of the criminals and the recovery of the bonds and notes stolen in transit between Boulogne and Calais on the night of the thirteenth instant.” Here followed a long list of the stolen securities and numbers of notes. Heaton, peering round Whale’s

elbow, laid the trim nail of his little finger on one number, and then, shooting his shirt cuff over his hand, set the pencilled memorandum there above it.

“That’s all, my boy. That was the number of the bond on top of the pile. They were lying on his table.”

CHAPTER XV.

SEVEN years ago the reader caught a momentary sight of one M. Vergueil, standing in a brown study at the door of Misseri's Hotel in Constantinople. This gentleman was a figure in the police department of Paris, and enjoyed a high reputation both for astuteness and good fortune. But like others amongst the astutest and the happiest, he found one thing denied him, and he so puzzled over the one case which baffled his intelligence that his failure in that respect left a drop of gall at the bottom of every cup of success he quaffed. The governments of three or four countries had unitedly agreed to leave in M. Vergueil's hands the investigation of a series of railway robberies. He had started on his work with something like certainty, and bit by bit his case had melted away between his fingers. It became a forlorn hope in the first six months, and M. Vergueil became a man with a grievance. He laid hands on scores of notorious criminals, he had brilliant successes by the dozen, but he had made

nothing whatever of the great railway robberies, and his disappointment clouded him.

M. Vergueil's business had brought him to London. Forged notes of the Bank of France had been put in circulation at Monte Carlo and Spa pretty extensively, and had been dropped here and there in small quantities in the great cities of Europe. The imitation of the hundred-franc note was so admirable that only an expert could be relied upon to detect the difference between it and the actual issue of the bank. M. Vergueil's inquiries had led him to the belief that the seat of the forgery was in England, and both in lighting upon the original track and in following it up he had so far been blessed with even more than his usual good fortune.

He had taken up his head-quarters at the Westminster Hotel, and sitting in his room immersed in thought over a cigarette and a glass of sugared water, he found himself awakened by the living accents of a voice which was at that moment speaking to his fancy's ear.

"Mr. Ronald Morton," said the voice.

M. Vergueil set his whole soul in his ears and listened. He might hear nothing worth the hearing, but on the other hand he was a gentleman who never missed a chance, and he was peculiarly anxious to know all that could be known of the owner of this particular voice. The room in which he sat and that in which the conversation was going on communicated by a door, which was for the present locked on one side and bolted on the other. M. Vergueil noiselessly kicked off his slippers, and crossing the room with

a cat-like nicety of tread, dropped on his knees with his ear at the key-hole, and so stayed. The watchful grin upon his face was a study for intentness, but every now and then as the conversation went on the mere ghost of a smile flickered across it, and at the mention of Mr. Gilfoil's name his eye sparkled brightly for a single second. In his eagerness to hear he hardly dared to breathe, and to let his breath go silently he clenched his teeth with his lips drawn away from them in a curiously ghastly smile. When at last Heaton addressed his interlocutor as Mr. William Reid the detective gave such a start that his head came into contact with the door knob, and for a little while between his rage at his own clumsiness, his fear that he had betrayed a listener's presence, and the actual physical pain of the blow, he lost knowledge of what was going on. The next thing that came clearly to him was the gallant Captain's noisy and defiant "Good morning." He heard the door open and close, and listened to the footsteps in the corridor, and hastily snatching up a pair of boots, in order to have some ostensible reason for quitting his chamber, he dodged cat-like to the head of the stairs, and peered after Messrs. Hump and Heaton. He withdrew his head swiftly as the Captain looked about him, and glued himself to the wall of the corridor. There was a little silence between the pair, and the detective's strained ears caught the rustle of paper only. Then he heard Heaton's voice saying,

"That's all, my boy. That was the number of the bond on top of the pile. They were lying on his table."

M. Vergueil admitted to his detractors that he was lucky. He had a little satiric habit among them of attributing all his success to the unbought blessings of fortune, but as he walked quietly back to his room he owned that no such stroke of luck as this had ever come to him. He had given William Reid up this half-dozen years, had abandoned him with grief and wounded pride. He had longed for him as men only long for the unattainable ; and being a person of a quick and vivid temperament had sometimes gritted his teeth in sudden rage at the manner in which he had been evaded. And now the delightful, un hoped for, unattainable thing, the fabled bird of contentment whom men follow for ever and who will not allow himself to be caught, came to him without even a call, and perched upon his hand. The eminent detective was happier than if he had heard that some dead millionaire had bequeathed him all his belongings. He sat in his own room smiling radiantly, and gripping one hand with the other, as if he were shaking hands with himself in a delighted self-congratulation.

He listened for the movements of the next room's occupant, and allowed his mind to play about him in charmed speculation. It was no wonder that he had not been able to track William Reid into the wildest fastnesses of Asia. It was not at all remarkable now that no attempt had been made to place the stolen bonds upon the market. William Reid had left them in safe keeping that Ronald Morton might, after long lapse of time, withdraw them. He could not keep out of his mind a grim respect for

the man with whom he would have to deal. It was no common little scoundrel who had buried himself for seven years in the earth's darkest places to build up a barrier between himself and justice. M. Vergueil's blood flushed at the fancy. He loved a worthy adversary, and the man seemed to him to have played a giant game. His heart warmed towards him.

He sat in resolute patience for hours, scarcely moving, and insensible to weariness or ennui. Patience met his reward at last, and his neighbour went away, locking his door behind him. He looked from his own chamber door, and caught sight of the stalwart retiring figure. He had remarked this noticeable neighbour of his before, and something in the square set of the shoulders and the poise of the head struck him anew.

"He will be a fiend when I come to deal with him," said M. Vergueil to himself.

He followed him calmly down the stairs to make sure of his disappearance from the hotel, and lingering on the hotel steps with a pretence of consulting some memoranda which he drew from his pocket he heard the eminent traveller call a cab.

"Where to, sir?"

"The Fancy Fair, Albert Hall."

"We are beginning to lose our native modesty," said M. Vergueil, smiling to himself, "and to go a little into society."

With that he turned with an elaborate air of having forgotten something, and marched briskly up the stairs. As he went he drew from his pocket a bunch

of keys, calmly selected one, and went on dangling it between his thumb and finger. He walked straight to Roland Morton's room, and with the insolence and aplomb begotten of long service unlocked the door, passed through, and secured it by the bolt on the other side. He took a survey of the place. A portmanteau stood in one corner of the room, and dropping on his knees beside it he selected from his bunch of passkeys one that looked likely for the purpose, and tried it in the lock.

"That will be a work of time," he said. "The lock is a patent. Very well, I will try elsewhere first."

The lock of the wardrobe offered no difficulty, and there before him on the middle shelf lay a great pile of Austrian bonds. He smiled placidly, and drew from his pocket a memorandum book, on one page of which was pasted a slip of newspaper. He consulted the cutting and the number of the topmost bond. Then he smiled anew, more placidly even than before and extracting a single sheet from the middle of the pile he folded it deliberately and put it into his breast pocket.

Next he relocked the wardrobe, walked to the door and listened there for a moment, and slipping out to the corridor, was in his own room in a twinkling. He stayed there but a very little while, drawing on his gloves with a thoughtful look.

"That will do," he said. "I can enlighten Mr. Frost at once. He can be trusted to hold his tongue until the proper moment, and he has waited long and patiently enough to deserve a little hope."

He walked down stairs, ordered a cab, and being

driven to Park Lane alighted at the entrance of a mansion there, and tendering his card, asked for Mr. Frost. Mr. Frost was not at home, but M. Vergueil, extracted from the footman the intelligence that his master had gone to the fancy fair, that day opened at the Albert Hall. Thither M. Vergueil pursued him, and after a prolonged wandering about the hall found the object of his search. The detective was not a man who permitted himself easily to be surprised, but for the moment he was knocked all abroad by an unexpected coincidence. Mr. Frost was engaged in animated converse with no less a person than Ronald Morton. After the first shock of surprise this lent a certain piquancy to the situation to his mind.

The two men stood near a stall over which appeared the names of Lady McCorquodale, Lady Mabel Ventnor, and Miss Grey, and one stately old lady and two pretty young ones were listening together with Mr. Frost whilst the eminent traveller talked. M. Vergueil approached the group with a subtle triumph stirring sweetly at his heart. He raised his hat with quite a grand air.

"Pardon my intrusion," he said, in English a little more set and deliberate than natives use, and only faintly noticeable for its accent. "Permit me to recall myself to the memory of Mr. Frost, with whom I have one moment's urgent business."

"No need to recall yourself," said Frost. "Excuse me for a single instant," he added to the ladies.

"A single instant," echoed M. Vergueil. "No more."

His face gave no sign, but he had not often in his

life felt so happy. He had taken the prosecutor from under the nose of the criminal, and had left the trapped rascal there secure. It was a beautiful sensation, an apt reward for seven years' patience, a fitting solace for seven years' disappointment. Mr. Humphrey Frost's millions made his progress across the hall a little difficult. He was waylaid with fascinating smiles, and wheedled by a score of insinuating tongues. He parted with a good many sovereigns and five pound notes en route, for he had gone there ready to be plucked, and accepted the process with a smiling urbanity. At last he was through the crowd, and drawing Vergueil into the conservatory turned round and faced him.

"You have made a discovery?" he asked.

"I have made a discovery," Vergueil answered. He took the bond from his pocket and laid it in Frost's hands.

"Is that one of my Austrians?" Frost asked after looking at it.

"That is one of your Austrians," answered Vergueil, like a polite echo.

"How did it come into your hands?"

"I stole it," whispered Vergueil. "I stole it from the thief this afternoon. He has a mass of them in his possession."

"Have you arrested the man?" Frost asked.

"Not yet. At present that would be indiscreet." He looked cautiously about him, and having made sure that they were out of earshot he added in a low tone, "I am here on government business. I have reason to think that I have my hand over the forgers

of French banknotes. The man in whose possession I found the bonds is one of the gang, and the same people who are issuing the counterfeit notes seem one and all to be implicated in the railway robbery in which your bonds were lost. In telling you this Mr. Frost, I need not say that I rely absolutely upon your silence. I do not speak of business of this kind to everybody, but I have already had such excellent proof of your discretion that I know beforehand that I risk nothing in telling you. I thought you had a right to know, and I give you the information as soon as possible, in the assurance that you will keep it as secret as the grave."

Humphrey Frost was a very considerable personage, but M. Vergueil took a tone of quiet authority with him which he in nowise resented.

"You may rely upon my silence," he responded simply. "May I go back to the ladies? Would you like me to introduce you? You are aware that M. Vergueil is a distinguished figure. Everybody knows of him, everybody talks about him, but nobody has the good fortune to meet him."

"Good fortune?" said Vergueil, "that depends. It is not everybody who thinks it good fortune to encounter me. But I beg you to excuse me from the honour of an introduction. I am like the highwayman of old, I prefer to throw aside my incognito only in places suitable to my purpose."

CHAPTER XVI

WHILST M. Vergueil sat like patience in an arm-chair in his own apartment listening with a somewhat tigerish vigilance to the movements of his neighbour, Harry Wynne was busy with his own reflections.

"So it seems," his thoughts ran, "that poor Morton was a swindler. I thought that hair-dying game of his was a mere bit of foppery, and now I suppose it was part of a disguise. No wonder I couldn't find Kekewich in Cheshire, or that the Morton family in those parts had left no trace behind them. I didn't even steal a real name from him. He was a kindly hearted sweep. He was very gentle with that bruised leg of mine.

"I think I have Mr. Hump this time. It's odd when one comes to think of it, how much mischief a real callous scoundrel will do for such a little profit. Supposing that he and Heaton, and Butterfield shared what they got from the Earl of Bridgebourne between them, what would it amount to? Two or three hundreds apiece at the outside. And for that

the blackguards hunted a foolish lad from his native country, robbed him of his sweetheart, disgraced and proscribed him. Was I an especial greenhorn, or are there young fellows about town in the same sort of mess this minute? I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance as yet, Gilead, but I will walk into your parlour, since I can meet your friends there, and we will all enjoy ourselves together."

He was filled with a righteous joy at the prospect of detecting and discomfiting the villains who had ruined him. The belief in Inthia's fidelity to his memory made his wrath against them all the greater. They had robbed him of her all these years, and they had robbed her of him. It was out of no coxcombry that he knew that she loved him. She had had one of the best men in England at her feet for years. He was still there, and was evidently ready to stay there all his lifetime. Only a profound attachment to the memory of her boyish sweetheart could have kept the girl from accepting so brilliant an offer from so excellent a man as Humphrey Frost. Harry felt warm and friendly to his rival, as an honest lover may when he knows that the rival's presence brings no danger.

"I will keep my alias," he said to himself, as he walked with a resolute footstep up and down the room, hurried into physical motion by the tumult of his mind. "I will keep my alias until I have unmasked these scoundrels, but not an hour beyond. It is more than my right to proclaim myself, it is a duty. I must repay the old man the money he spent to clear me. I must tell Inthia who I am, and

ask her if she can take her lover back again. I have been a fool too often to dare to brag of wisdom now, but God knows I have tried hard to atone to my own heart, and I know humbly that I am a better man than I was when I went away."

His mind ran in these grooves for hours. At one minute he melted at the thought of Inthia, and at the next he felt a solemn exultation over the rascals who had broken him.

No man lives at high pressure for ever, and even a lover, and the hero of a real tragedy, will find moments of rest and quiet. Harry ordered luncheon in his own room, and attacked it with something like his desert appetite, in spite of the exercises of love and war upon which he was engaged. Then in due time he dressed with an unusual, scrupulous care, and betook himself to the fancy fair at the Albert Hall, drawn thither by the advertised fact that Inthia had partial charge of one of the stalls. He could see her and be near her, could speak to her and hear her voice, and his pulses sang with a tender triumph at the thought of her truth, her goodness and her beauty. He was not quit of the shame of his old errors and follies, nor, to do him justice, was he the man to ask to be quit of it until he had paid his penalties in full, and had made confession and restitution. He would owe a lifelong devotion even then. But there was yet a delight in standing behind the veil of his alias, and in watching as it were unseen the workings of that generous, unforgetting heart. How many women were there in the world, he asked himself, who could have kept faith unimpaired

through such dark days as he had left her to? His heart knelt before her in pure worship, as if she were a saint enshrined.

The great commonplaces have their way in spite of all heroisms and passions. The crowd at the Albert Hall was as flippant, as uninteresting, and as banale as a crowd usually is to the stranger in its midst. He was there with his emotions, and the fashionable mob was inappropriate. He was recognised, followed about, pointed at. He was the target for hundreds of pairs of delicately held tortoiseshell rimmed glasses, and of scores upon scores of single eye glasses. People pressed upon him with that impertinent and intolerable scrutiny which is only seen in well dressed assemblies. By and by other celebrities turned up, and to his huge contentment drew the attention of the crowd away. He was free to seek and to find Inthia's stall, and there, standing in front of it, he found his old acquaintance and long-standing rival Humphrey Frost, who had already bought so much that he was ashamed to buy more. The stall was half denuded by his purchases, and Lady McCorquodale was in majestic high spirits with the magnificence of her receipts.

Mr. Humphrey Frost was introduced to the distinguished traveller, and shook hands with him without a suspicion of his identity.

"Mr. Morton," said Lady McCorquodale, "was with our poor dear Harry at his death. The poor boy was shot down at his side, and Mr. Morton himself was dangerously wounded at the same moment."

At this Frost began to question warmly, and whilst the conversation was still going on a smooth gentleman of foreign exterior, with a scarcely perceptible foreign accent, approached the pair and drew the millionaire away.

“You will understand, Mr. Morton,” said her stately ladyship, “how very natural it is that your return to England should bring poor Harry to our minds again. He was always our favourite, and we can never forget him, but there is a freshness about his memory now.” The old lady’s dark eyes were suspiciously brilliant, but she continued with her usual dignity. “He did not know what he was running away from. It is quite possible that if he had lived he would have been the head of the family. My father is ninety-nine years of age, Mr. Morton, and in the course of nature he cannot last much longer, but in constitution he is scarcely older than Lord Hounes. Charles Seaforth, Lord Hounes’s son, is a confirmed valetudinarian. He has been married thirteen years, and has no family. Colonel Seaforth, poor Harry’s uncle, who was next in the line, is dead, though his life seemed to be worth the other three put together. And so you see if the poor foolish boy had lived he would have been very near to the earldom of Bridgebourne now. You must forgive me for speaking of these things to you, but Harry was a comrade of yours, and I can see that you cared for him. You will not be impatient at the recital of an old woman’s trouble.”

How little, he thought, he had known that they all cared for him. Half the past was obliterated

in his mind. He forgot and was willing to forget the angry opposition which her ladyship had offered to him. That at least was buried with the past.

That sunburned and massive exterior the traveller had brought back with him showed nothing of the tender riot in his heart. He and Inthia had saluted each other to all appearance after the most casual and commonplace fashion. But he could not for his soul keep out of his eyes for the one brief second during which they rested upon hers, a hint of the worship which filled his mind. She had grown to be a finished woman of the world, and was not to be scared out of her self-possession by an ardent glance. Her looks were all the cooler for it, but the glance fluttered her strangely. She wondered a little that she was not angered by it, it seemed so full of a meaning which no stranger had a right to express to her. She was not in the least angry, except with herself because she could command no anger. On the contrary she felt an almost overpowering curiosity about the man, and must needs look at him again. That instinct of the eye, the working of which everybody has experienced, warned Harry of her gaze. Their eyes met point blank, and flashed an untranslatable message from each to each. She felt a vivid blush dye her very throat and forehead, and turned hastily away. He, knowing that his glance had frightened her, abused himself savagely, and tried to pin himself down to the vivacious chatter of Lady Mabel, who was pressing a small pocket portfolio upon him.

“It is quite a gem in its way,” said her ladyship, musingly. “There is nothing here, Mr. Morton, which purchasers dare criticise, unless, indeed, they are armed with feminine terrors. All these objects of beauty are the work of our own hands. This portefeuille is mine.” She made a pretty pretence of surprise on opening it. “No. I must not steal a sister artist’s credit. This is Miss Grey’s embroidery. I recognise it by its neatness. My own style has more bravura in it. It is only five pounds. Surely you need no persuasion.”

He needed none, indeed. At that moment he would have given all he owned for the possession of any trifle which had actually felt the touch of Inthia’s fingers. He paid the five pounds, and the elegant trifle was his own. He put his hand to his breast pocket, and drew out the little leather wallet which held Inthia’s last letter. His heart so overflowed over the old souvenir and the new that his fingers and his bearded lips both trembled. That wonderful instinct of the eye struck him again, and he looked up through a thin, swift flash of tears. Once more he met Inthia’s glance, and again she blushed beneath it, and turned away in a new wonder and confusion. How dared the man to look at her, and why did she not resent it? Why did she even feel a pleasure in it? A raw country girl would have known better how to preserve her dignity.

Lady Mabel was holding up the note in a half-coquettish, secret triumph to Lady McCorquodale, so that she and the old lady saw nothing of this rapid byplay. Inthia was quite unnerved, and fell with

shaking fingers to arranging some trifles about the stall.

At this point Humphrey Frost came providentially back again, and renewed the broken talk. Harry could speak with him, at least, without betraying the emotions which filled him. By and by Lady Mabel broke in upon them.

"After your presence at a fancy fair, Mr. Morton, your profession of recluse will not be allowed to serve you. A fancy fair, except for the stall-keepers, is the most frivolous of town amusements. A ball, by comparison, is quite a solemn function. I shall really expect to see you at Milne House on Friday. I have received a response to my invitation beginning, 'Mr. Ronald Morton regrets,' and bearing lithography upon its face. Now that shows that you are declining invitations wholesale, but really I expect you to reconsider your determination."

"You will be at Lady Mabel's ball, Miss Grey?" said Frost, leaning across the counter.

"We are dissipating terribly this week," Inthia answered, with an almost feverish brightness. "We have three days of the fancy fair, the garden party at Lambeth Palace on Thursday, and Lady Mabel's ball on Friday."

"Come, Mr. Morton," said Lady Mabel, "pray consent to bear the penalties of your position. If you are a shy lion I promise that you shall not be over-hunted."

"I shall be delighted," said Harry, "to accept your invitation."

Inthia experienced a new disturbance. She had actually indicated her intended whereabouts, and it looked to her as if she had offered an appointment. The man had certainly accepted it. And even yet she was not angry. Lady Mabel enjoyed quite a reputation as a lively and agreeable chatterbox, and once having found that the new lion, in spite of his scar and his other reminiscences of the desert, was clawless, she played about him with all the popgun artillery of her conversational charms. At something she said Frost broke into a decorous laugh, and Harry, whose spirits were at something like fever heat, took it up in less conventional fashion. He had always had a jolly and infectious laugh, and had not of late years been accustomed to confine it within drawing-room limits. It rang out over the hum of talk, and two or three score of people turned to look at him. Inthia found Lady McCorquodale regarding her almost with a look of terror, and at that became conscious of her own aspect. Both hands had gone to her heart, and she was standing with parted lips and frightened eyes.

The laugh was so like Harry's.

When she had first seen Mr. Ronald Morton he had brought Harry to her mind. The laugh brought him back again even more vividly. The look the stranger had bent upon her had been like Harry's. A mad, half-formed fancy made her limbs tremble. She knew how foolish and how wild it was, and put it from her mind, but she knew now the source of the interest the traveller excited in her. The tones

of his voice had now and then a hint of Harry's in them. His eyes wore a look of Harry—a resemblance fugitive, but strong. She understood her own feeling, and in that knowledge became mistress of herself again.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT about six o'clock that evening M. Vergueil, strolling leisurely into the vestibule of the hotel, saw there a man in a velvet skull-cap of dark blue seated in a little go-cart. He was in animated conversation with the hall porter, and the detective, turning his back upon him, studied the addresses of the telegrams exposed in a glass case upon the wall.

"Gilfoil," said the man in the go-cart, in a strong American tone. "Gilead C. Gilfoil, to see Mr. Ronald Morton. That's my card, and it's got to go up stairs."

"Well, sir, I've told you already," the hall-keeper answered, "that Mr. Morton's orders are imperative. Your name, sir, is not on the list."

"I sha'n't leave till I've seen him," the man in the go-cart responded, "and if you won't take up my card, you'll have to take up a note. Get me an envelope."

The man obeyed, and whilst he was away M. Vergueil continued his study of the telegrams in the glass case. Mr. Gilfoil pencilled a line or two upon a

leaf torn from his pocket-book, put his brief missive into the envelope handed to him by the hall porter, and was in the act of addressing it, when a young man of commonplace exterior came down the staircase, fluttering a sheet of paper in his hand."

"That's the amended list," he said, addressing the hall-porter. "There are two or three new names on it. You'll find the additions at the bottom."

With that and a nod the young man was gone. The hall-porter, casting his eye over the paper placed in his hand, turned again to the man in the go-cart.

"Mr. Gilfoil," he said, "your name is here. Mr. Morton's secretary has just put the list into my hands."

"That's all right," said Mr. Gilfoil. "You've got a lift, I reckon. Where is it?"

"This way, sir."

Mr. Gilfoil set his little wheeled chair in dexterous motion, and followed the man's footsteps. M. Vergueil ceased his interested study and walked quietly up stairs. He went so leisurely that the man in the go-cart had been admitted to Mr. Ronald Morton's rooms before the detective had entered the corridor.

Harry Wynne stood in the centre of the room to receive his visitor, and when the waiter opened the door Mr. Gilfoil steered deftly into the apartment. The door closed behind him, and the two were left alone. The paralytic sat in his chair with one blanched hand on either of the handles by which its mechanism was moved, cocking his porcelain blue eyes upwards at the other's face.

"You're backing down a little, are you, William?" he said in a tone of dry satiric triumph.

Harry returned no answer, but studied his man with a look of calm inquiry. The man studied him in answer, pressing upon him a daring and insolent gaze.

"You can stand where you are, William," he said, after staring at him for perhaps half a minute. "I'll take a tower of observation round you."

He set his wheeled chair in motion, threading noiselessly among chairs and tables, and keeping his eye fixed upon his supposed recalcitrant confederate. A mere flash of amusement lit Harry's eyes as the examiner passed behind him, but by the time Mr. Gilfoil came round to his starting place he had gone as impassive as before.

"You would appear to be interested in my personal appearance, Mr. Gilfoil," he said quietly.

"I am that," Mr. Gilfoil responded, and continued his scrutiny. "You've altered, William, and I ain't a bit surprised that you thought that you could bluff us. You might ha' done it too, I don't mind telling you, if you'd had the nous to take a new alias. You wouldn't let out much to Peter this morning, but it wasn't like you to leave them bonds about, was it, William?"

His wicked blue eye bored at the supposed William like a gimlet.

"You and your comrades, Mr. Gilfoil," Harry answered him, "seem to have a curious love of mystery. A Captain Heaton, who announced himself as your friend, was here this morning, and offered me

a great number of mysterious inuendoes. I besought him to speak plainly, but it was all of no avail. He persisted in all manner of vague evasions, and I want to tell you now, Mr. Gilfoil, that I am prepared to call a spade a spade, and that I expect you, in your dealings with me, to display a similar candour. What do you want from me?"

Mr. Gilfoil wheeled his chair a foot or two nearer, and motioned to a seat.

"Sit down there," he said. "I don't know what kind o' game you're playing, but you ain't going to give me away if I can help it. You ain't gone deaf, have you, William? You don't want hailing through a speaking trumpet. Bend your head down."

Harry did as he was told. The little paralytic looked viperous enough to give him a touch of actual physical distaste for nearness, but he had not been accustomed to stick at trifles in that direction.

"There is nobody, so far as I know, to overhear us, but you may speak as quietly as you please. Only tell me in plain English what you want."

"D'ye see this?" whispered Gilfoil with a sudden and intensely savage gesture of his blanched hands, which seemed to take in himself from head to feet.

"I see," Harry responded.

"You see," returned Mr. Gilfoil, growing cold as suddenly as he had grown hot; "and bitter little you care when you do see. You ask me what I want, and I'm going to tell you. I want payment for seven years' solitary confinement with hard labour in this machine. I want to be paid for a paralysed spine and legs that ain't no use to me. You got off scot free, William,

and I didn't. When we dropped off that there train together you fell soft and I fell hard, and now you're going to fall hard and I'm going to fall soft if I know how to. Now don't you make any mistake about that, William, because it's so."

"What will be will be, Mr. Gilfoil," said Harry. "We shall see."

"Now I won't take any Mr. Gilfoiling from you," the cripple answered with that tendency to fly irritably off at any tangent which sufferers of his kind so commonly display. "My name's Gilead, and I'll trouble you to call me by it."

"If you insist upon it, Gilead."

Mr. Gilfoil was far from being mollified by this concession, and fixed a venomous eye upon his companion, as if he would willingly have done him any cruel mischief, and was only held back from it by his own impotence.

"You got off with the coin," he said, "and I got off with a paralysed spine and legs that ain't no use to me. I thought you meant to be square, and if you didn't, I'm blamed if I know now what made you pick me up and carry me three miles to that thundering cutter. If you meant to keep your claws on everything you'd have found it a safer game to leave me there. I should have split in that case to be sure, but they wouldn't have given you more than fourteen or fifteen years, and you'll be worse off than that, William, if you try to get around me now. My share's half. You can arrange afterwards with the Co. as you like. They're poor cattle, Hump and Peter and Butterfield are, and that's a fact. You've got the

bonds in your hands. They were seen here this morning. We'll go over 'em now, if you please, and I'll take half of 'em."

At the shock of this discovery Harry rose to his feet and took a step or two across the room.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Gilfoil, reading these signs in his own way, "it was a greenhorn's trick to leave 'em open on the table. It wasn't a bit like you. But the Captain saw 'em, and he's got the numbers. Fetch 'em out, and let's have a look at 'em."

"Can't you give me a chance to be honest, Gilead?" said Harry. With this complete revelation of the people implicated his last shred of unwillingness to play the part of William Reid vanished. He accepted the position frankly, and set quick wits to work to choose the most natural standpoint. "What do you think I went away for seven years for, Gilead?"

"Well if you ask me," said Gilead, "I should say it was because you hadn't got the pluck to come home again. There were a heap of kind inquiries after you."

"Suppose I had had about enough of it, Gilead? Suppose I'd made up my mind that the game wasn't worth the candle. Suppose I said to myself 'I'll start fresh, make an honest name, and cut the old gang altogether.' Suppose——"

"You're doin' a pile o' supposing," interjected Gilead. "Suppose I suppose a little. S'pose you stop all this tommy rot and hand all them bonds out."

"Suppose I don't?" answered Harry. "Suppose I hand them to the rightful owners?"

"I'm the rightful owner of one half of 'em," Gilfoil answered, "and I'm going to have what belongs to me. As to you turning honest, William, I shall believe that when I see the Tower o' London floating in mid-Atlantic. Honest! Why you're enough to turn the stomach of a hog. Takes up with honesty, and wants to cheat his old pal. A fine old honest seven years you've been having, I'll bet. You couldn't bring the blooming desert with you, could you, William? but I guess you cleaned it out. The next white man that goes there won't find many pickings left. I wouldn't bear a family resemblance to you and travel in them parts, not much I wouldn't. Honest! Here, you've got a drink of something on the premises? Let me get the taste of that out of my mouth."

He wheeled his chair to a sideboard, and helped himself from a decanter and a syphon which stood there, and having drunk with an air of indignant disgust, returned.

"Look here," he began again, "when I want that kind of stuff thrown at me I'll take up a location or a piece of waste land, and stick up a sign-board telling the folks that rubbish can be shot there. Fetch them bonds out."

"Of what use will they be to you, Gilead?" Harry asked, beginning to find a certain grim humour in the situation, and rather to his own surprise enjoying it.

"That's my business," Gilead responded. "We ain't so all-fired clever as you are, but we *have* managed to do a bit of business in your absence,

William. We're doing a bit now, and if you didn't want to play these mule games we could make it worth your while to be in it, big bug as you're grown."

Harry drew his chair a little closer, and suppressing a fleeting desire to take Mr. Gilfoil by the throat and shake the life out of him, spoke with a semblance of awakened interest.

"Could you really, Gilead?"

"Yes, sirre, I could," Gilead answered. "The first thing you've got to do is to plank out them bonds."

"Come now, Gilead," said Harry, "what's the new game?"

"We'll wind up the old one first," said the tenacious Gilead. "Fork out them bonds."

"I don't think I shall do that yet, Gilead," Harry answered; "but if you have anything big enough to tempt me——"

"We'll talk about that afterwards," Mr. Gilfoil interposed, with his wicked white face close to his companion's.

"Very well," said Harry, rising anew. "As you please. You have forgotten one thing. It would not suit my present game, Gilead, to have these bonds put upon the market."

"That," said Gilead emphatically, "is the first piece of straight talk you've done. If you'd seen fit to meet me in that sperrit all along we might ha' saved both time and temper. What *will* suit your present game?"

"The old plan won't suit my game, Gilead. The new one might. Let's know all about it."

"Let's make a bargain," said Gilead. "If the bonds ain't to go onto the market we can take care of 'em just as well as you can, and we're game to do it. You can hand the whole lot of 'em over into our safe keeping, and then we'll talk to you. I'm not going to say a word about that sort of business here. You come to my shanty. I'll have the other boys to meet you. You can hand the things over formal, and everybody will know who's got 'em. It will be all square and above board, and then, if there's any further business to be done, we'll talk it over. I've never so much as hinted, William, that we sha'n't be glad to have you back again. We can make it worth your while this time, if we couldn't before, and I've always given you full credit for your abilities. You come to me to-morrow, twelve o'clock at noon, 112 Fitzroy Street. G. C. G. over the top bell."

"Good!" said Harry, "I'll be there."

"You'll bring the bonds along with you?" asked Gilead. "Now mind, this is the last time of asking. If you're going to be dodgy with us we shall make you real sick, William. I shall conduct that party personally, you take my word for it."

"I understand," said Harry quietly. "You shall have the bonds to-morrow."

Gilead took his leave, wheeled himself to the lift, was lowered to the ground floor, and was assisted to the pavement.

M. Vergueil, with a face of consummate innocence, had descended two minutes before him, and now stood contemplating the evening prospect in the street. Two men of decent and respectable aspect

stood smoking and chatting on the opposite pavement. M. Vergueil laid a forefinger on his lower lip, and a few seconds later one of the men opposite did the same. The foreigner moved courteously on one side to allow Mr. Gilfoil's little carriage to be carried past him. He laid his finger on his underlip again. Mr. Gilfoil was lifted into a four-wheeler, and the go-cart being placed on the top of the vehicle, he was driven away. The two men on the opposite side of the way got into a hansom which crawled up with a casual air at that moment, and without giving instructions to the driver, set off leisurely in the same direction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. GILEAD C. GILFOIL when at home permitted himself to suffer from no lack of occupation. He was a gentleman of varied pursuits and employments, and amongst other things he took a considerable interest in chemistry. Living upon the second floor, he had caused a small laboratory to be erected on the leads outside his sitting-room window at the back of the house—a mere box built of corrugated iron. It was set against the dead wall of the house, but admitted light and air on three sides.

On the day after his interview with Ronald Morton Mr. Gilfoil sat in this retreat engaged in an occupation of considerable nicety. A curious atmosphere pervaded the little chamber, and the two side windows and that in the door were thrown wide open to allow free passage to the air. Mr. Gilfoil had before him a glass bottle with a screw stopper, and four little objects in vulcanite which resembled pocket pencils. At the butt of each of these was a small polished knob of nickel, running in a slot with a curve at the

base, and at the top a diminishing point of the same metal. Mr. Gilfoil unscrewed the tips, revealing in each case the top of a needle-pointed glass syringe. He tested the working of these small instruments with great delicacy, and finding them act to his satisfaction, rang an electric bell which stood within easy reach of his hand. The summons was answered by Miss Priscilla Gilfoil, who wrinkled the bridge of her nose in disgust at the odour of the place.

"I never knew in all *my* life such a man for sitting among smells as you are. The place smells as if it was full of rotten apples. Well, I do declare, you've got them murderous little things in hand again. All I hope is you won't be able to make 'em work."

"They'll work this time," said Gilead placidly. He took one of them in his hand, and surveyed it with the complacency of a successful inventor. "You bring me a tumbler o' clear water."

The girl obeyed, and stood by while Gilead tested the syringes, filling them by suction, and expelling the water with great force and directness in a thin jet.

"That's the latest scent-squirt," said Gilead smiling. "The Lady's Surprise I mean to call it. You'll see it in all the shop windows by'n by. Gentleman asks you for the loan of a pencil, you unscrew the tip for him, he bends over thinking it's a new invention, and then you get your little joke quite easy. Look here, it'll throw a jet ten feet, and it carries as straight as a rifle, and it don't waste the thousandth part of a spot."

Priscilla watched his illustration of the virtues of the instrument with a face of stern disapproval.

"I don't think," she said, "there's another man alive fiendish enough to think of such a thing."

"Don't you waste your time in compliments. You fetch me that glass mask and my breathing tube. You'll find 'em both in the box under the bed."

"What are you going to fill those things with, Gilead?" the girl asked sternly.

"Eau de Cologne, my darling," returned Gilead, with a smile of amusement at his own retort. "You get them things. Bring 'em to me, and then clear out."

The girl retired, with a toss of the head, with which she seemed to resign herself to unmeasured folly. In her absence Gilead screwed to the edge of the table a revolving fan, and tested its action with as much care and precision as he had shown in all his former movements. Priscilla by and by brought back the articles for which he had despatched her, and still wrinkling her nose at the odour of the place, assisted him in putting on the mask, and placed the end of the breathing tube across the window ledge. When this operation was completed he dismissed her with a wave of the hand. The girl retired, closing behind her the French windows which admitted from the leads to the sitting-room. Gilead, drawing on a pair of gloves of goldbeater skin, examined them minutely, and discovering them to be quite flawless, unscrewed the stopper of the bottle before him, and filled each of the syringes in turn from its contents, all his motions being marked by the finest delicacy and care. He restoppered the bottle, and restored its original coverings of oiled silk and wash-leather. He wiped the

point of each syringe with a clean fragment of an old cambric handkerchief, which he burned in a crucible stove in one corner of the apartment. Then having screwed on the caps of the syringes he set the fan in motion, producing a strong current of air.

After two minutes of this he rang again, and Priscilla re-entered. Gilead, with his features oddly distorted behind his mask, lifted his blanched hands towards his head. The girl understood the gesture, and assisted him to remove the mask and the breathing tube attached to it.

"I think," said Gilead, "we've fixed it this time."

"I don't see what you want the murderous things at all for," said Priscilla. She was a girl who adhered to ideas and phrases.

"Don't you?" Gilead answered in a tone of badinage. "Well, I do, and perhaps you'll make that enough for you."

His success had inspired him with an unusual good temper, and Priscilla, after the fashion of her sex, took advantage of the fact, and pursued the theme further than she ordinarily would have dared to do.

"If one of them gashly things was found about you, Gilead, you'd get into trouble. You can't have any but wicked uses for 'em."

"All right, my dear," returned Gilead. "Chatter away if it pleases you."

"Well, what good are they, any way?" Priscilla demanded scornfully.

"What good are they any way?" Gilead echoed, baring his teeth and turning upon her with a sudden snarl. "What good are they? I'll tell you what

good they are. I'm a worthless cripple, dead, or as good as dead, from the hips down, and with one of these in my fingers I'm a match, and more than a match, for the biggest hell-raker Texas ever bred." He took one of the syringes in his thumb and finger, and toyed with it. As he did so his complacency returned, but it was hard to say whether his expression were uglier in his rage or in his good humour. "There ain't no harm in taking a pencil-case out of your pocket, is there, my darling? Suppose I find myself in a tight corner some day. Suppose I find some brawny villain towering over me with a bowie or a six shooter, tellin' me he's going to have my blood. There ain't no harm in screwing this little cap off, is there? Not if you sit very calm and quiet, and look scared. But it's sudden death, my darling. It's only to be used in extremity, because sudden death to anybody is dangerous, almost anywhere. But it's a sweet invention."

Priscilla looked at him with an expression half alarmed and half wondering, and was turning away with a gesture of the head when he addressed her again.

"Move that table," he said, "and let me get out of this. Now open the door. Help me across this bit of a ridge. There we are."

He had laid the four innocent-looking, deadly things on a handkerchief in his lap, and now, having gained the sitting-room, he wheeled himself to the table, where he took up a cigarette case of Russia leather, in which he stowed the syringes away.

Then he took up a copy of that month's *Scientific*

Quarterly, and having lit his pipe and bestowed himself in a comfortable light, became absorbed in the perusal of an article on heat as a pain-relieving agent. After some half-hour he laid the magazine upon his knees, and looked up at Priscilla, who sat near him sewing.

"Upon my word," he said, "it's real lovely to see what science is doing nowadays for the relief of human suffering."

"And upon *my* word," Priscilla answered, "you're a curious sort of mixture, Gilead."

"I'm dead again the infliction of pain. Perhaps I've had enough of it myself to make me tender about it. There ain't no pain in these things," indicating the cigarette case in his pocket by a motion of the thumb. "If you've got to kill anybody, kill him clean and don't hurt him."

The conversation was interrupted by a ring of the bell.

"I reckon that'll be Willie," said Gilead, consulting his watch.

"Willie?" answered Priscilla. "Willie who?"

"Willie Reid," said Gilead.

"Of all the fools I've ever known, when you take an idea in your head you're the biggest. That man's no more Willie Reid than I am. You're just walking head forward into some trap or other."

"Trap! you chattering idiot!" snarled Gilead. "Didn't Willie Reid go up country in Turkey? Didn't Ronald Morton start where Willie Reid left off? Didn't I get a letter from him under that name? Did anybody but Willie Reid know where them

bonds were? And hasn't Ronald Morton got 'em now, and didn't he try all he knew to stick to 'em? Talk to me, you petticoated jackass! Git!"

"Very well," said Priscilla. "Go your own way, and when you come to pay for it you say I told you."

A rap at the door put an end to this brotherly and sisterly discourse, and the house servant presented a card on which was engraved the name of Mr. Ronald Morton.

"Show the gentleman up," said Gilead. "And you"—turning to Priscilla—"get aout."

She obeyed the injunction thus courteously given, and a second or two later Harry Wynne entered with a neatly-folded parcel in his hands.

"Them the bonds?" asked Gilead, with no preliminary greeting.

"These are the bonds, Gilead," his visitor answered, with a perfect show of ease and good humour.

"They make an uncommon small parcel, William. Let's have a look at 'em. There's nothing but Austrians here. Where's the Russians and the Italians?"

"All in good time, Gilead," said Harry. "These are all that were left in London."

"What about those on the Continent?"

"All in good time," Harry repeated. "Rome wasn't built in a day."

"You'll have to get 'em, Willie."

"Of course I shall get them."

At this moment the rumbling noise of a vehicle in the street, which had been growing more and more clearly audible for a minute past, ceased at the door.

"Here's the Co.," said Gilead. "They're a bit earlier than I expected. If you hadn't gone gallivantin' off to Asia, old man, we shouldn't ha' wanted any Co. There's no gettin' rid of 'em now. They haven't put more than eight hundred into the business altogether, and they take three-fifths of the whole profits between 'em. That's the curse of poverty, William. Ever sence you went away it's me that's found the brains and run the risk. But I've never been a capitalist. I cayn't keep money. I allus fritter it away on some blamed invention or another. I've got a regular heap of patents, but they don't gee, none of 'em, somehow. I cayn't get about much, William. I'm at a great disadvantage."

The housemaid announced Captain Heaton, Mr. Whale, and Mr. Butterfield, and these gentlemen, immediately following upon her footsteps, presented themselves smilingly at the door.

"Come in," said Gilead. "Be seated, gentlemen." He waited until the door was closed, and listened till the swift rattle of the retreating housemaid's dress had faded out of hearing. "I suppose," he said, then, with a wry smile, "there ain't no need to introduce you gentlemen?"

"I think not," said Harry. "I have met Captain Heaton and Mr. Whale quite recently, and I think I remember Mr. Butterfield."

"I think," said Mr. Butterfield, oleagenous as ever, "that I should myself have recognised Mr. Reid anywhere." He was anxious to display his perspicacity, and not unwilling to crow a little over his colleagues, who had been a little in doubt.

Mr. Butterfield was beginning to display a tendency to baldness, and looked, if anything, a trifle more than ever representative of the prosperous and intelligent British tradesman. Something had happened to his teeth, and when he smiled, as he did pretty constantly throughout the interview, he made so large an auriferous display that he seemed to promise well for mining purposes.

The amateur detective was at first hand put to it to maintain his own smiling demeanour in Mr. Butterfield's presence, and for one minute his blood actually boiled at the memory of that worthy's virtuous indignation at their last interview. But reflecting that every minute brought him nearer to his own triumph and his enemies' discomfiture, he controlled himself.

"I am glad to see," said Captain Heaton, "that Mr. Reid has consented to come round. I think we may honestly congratulate both ourselves and him on the decision at which he has arrived."

It was the gallant Captain's part informally to take the chair on such occasions as the present, and to make little business speeches of this sort, tempered by his own polished society airs.

"In the old days," said Mr. Butterfield, with an almost sentimental aspect, "our relations with Mr. Reid were of so cordial a nature, and were so profitable to all parties concerned——" here he came out of reverie, and rubbed his hands in a rich enjoyment in the memory of old profits—"that we may all consider ourselves fortunate in the renewal of our ancient ties."

"Shall we get to business, gentlemen?" said Harry,

with a suavity equalling the good man's own. "Mr. Gilfoil has at present in his possession all the bonds on which I have as yet been able to lay my hands. You must take that as an earnest of good faith. And now I suppose that I am not to be left out in the cold? Our ingenious friend Gilead informs me that there is a better thing on to-day than you ever had before, and that my services, if not exactly necessary, will at least be acceptable."

"I promised," said Gilead, "to take Willie in if he did the square thing; but I want to put it on a clear understanding. If there's any more hanky-panky on his part he'll have to take the risk."

"Gentlemen," said Harry, "I accept the risk. I shall take a perfectly straight course, I promise you."

"Mr. Reid's experience and abilities," said Captain Heaton, "will be of the greatest service to us. He distinctly understands what is expected from him in the way of fealty and in the way of business fairness. I think," he added, with the conscious ease of victory, "that our young friend has already been sufficiently admonished. We have shown him—in a friendly way, I trust, and not in a manner calculated to excite rancour—that we can hold our own—and I think in future we may hope to continue those cordial relations which we all found so agreeable years ago."

"Hear, hear!" said Hump. Mr. Butterfield echoed the encomium, and added, "Very neatly turned."

"Now, gentlemen," said the Captain, "I shall propose that Mr. Reid be admitted to our councils. Those who are in favour of that proposition will signify the same by a show of hands. Carried

unanimously. Mr. Reid, you are once more welcome back to the bosom of the family."

Gilead wheeled himself to a cupboard, and drew forth two bottles of champagne, of which Mr. Whale relieved him. Then he produced glasses, and wheeled himself back to the centre table. Hump produced a pocket champagne-opener, and opened the bottles with professional skill.

"An excellent wine," said Mr. Butterfield. "An excellent wine."

"It isn't Hump's private brand," said Harry, and at this there was a general laugh, for everybody supposed himself to recognise the allusion.

"Now," said Mr. Butterfield drawing out his watch, "harmony is happily restored. My time happens to be unusually valuable this morning. Can we get to business?"

"You have a sample, Gilead," said Captain Heaton.

"Yes," said Gilead, "I've got one. Proof after letters. Here it is."

He produced from an inner pocket a crisp bank-note of the Bank of France for one hundred francs and handed it to Harry, who examined it with great minuteness. Gilead, observing the intentness with which he pored upon it, shot away in his wheeled chair to a corner of the room, and returning with a large magnifying glass laid it on the table.

"I never found anything in this world," said Gilead philosophically, "that got to be any the better for being bragged about, but that's as fine a piece of engraving work as ever I put a tool on."

"Let Mr. Reid compare it with one of the originals,"

said Butterfield. He drew one of the originals from his own pocket-book and laid it beside the forgery.

The detection of forged bank-notes had never been any part of Harry Wynne's business, and the experts had already succeeded where he failed. But after a searching and minute examination he could discover no difference between the false note and the real. The whole party awaited his judgment with interest, and even with some show of anxiety. Gilead appeared to take umbrage at the length and closeness of the examination.

"You can look, William. You won't find nothing the matter with my work. If there is a weak point it's the paper."

It was not Harry's cue to express his own sentiments. He was there to impersonate Mr. William Reid, who would doubtless have been much less surprised than he was at the excellence of the imitation.

"It isn't bad," he said. "A man would have to be suspicious to suspect."

This was accepted by them all as a warm encomium on the work.

"These fellows," said Gilead with a tone and gesture scarcely respectful to his colleagues; "these fellows were in such a cursed hurry to get 'em on the market that they wouldn't wait to make a big splash with 'em. They've got out two small parcels, and though there's nothing been heard up to the present, we don't know at any minute that we mayn't get winded. I b'leeve in decision, and I think, Willie, I shall have you along with me. Pluck and patience are the horses

for my money, and I'm for making one stroke now everything's ready, that'll pay us for all outlay. Gentlemen," he continued, solemnly turning round to face his three partners, "I'm game to bet a thousand dollars to a Key West orange that William sides with me. It's no use frittering, William, is it?"

"Not a bit," said Harry decisively. "Take the thing by the neck and have done with it."

"You see, gentlemen!" said Gilead. "Now look here, Willie, my proposal all along has been to get one smart bold man. Let him do all the Booro de Change in London in a single day. Never more than a thousand francs anywhere. Take the night mail to Paris, put in a day's work there about the Pally Ryal, restorongs, banks, money-changers, everywhere, and after that lie quiet. A real live man like you can raise ten thousand sterling in that way. Reckon the exs. and loss on stones at two thousand pounds, that leaves a clear profit of eight thousand, and that's as much as we've got a right to expect for one while."

"If Mr. Reid can do business at that rate——" said Mr. Butterfield.

"Mr. Reid's done business at that rate," said Gilead. "At that rate and better. Why, nine year ago, with them hundred rouble notes, he passed 'em by the bushel. That was before any o' you people knew him. I'm derved if I knew him myself when he came home. That fat old German was the cleverest bit of make-up you ever did, William."

"These reminiscences," said Mr. Butterfield, "are extremely gratifying, but I am unfortunately pressed by other business. Can we come to an understand-

ing as to time? When can you be ready, Mr. Gilfoil?"

"I cayn't tell exactly," Gilead answered; "but I think you may reckon on having enough to begin the London boom with on Saturday morning. If William can come down to me on Friday night at twelve I think I can be ready."

"I am engaged on Friday night," said Harry, whose one anxiety was not to appear too anxious.

"Come, come, Mr. Reid," said Heaton, "this is serious business. It is very important, as you know, that the work should be done on Saturday and Sunday. I am afraid we were guilty of an indiscretion in opening with the small quantities we placed at Spa and Monte Carlo. We have heard nothing, but we may hear at any moment. We can afford to lose no time, and you must not allow any mere social engagements to keep you away."

"Very well," said Harry. "I must keep my engagement, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I will leave word that any message sent to me at the hotel shall be instantaneously delivered by my secretary wherever I may be."

"Very well," said Gilead. "You'll simply get the words 'Proofs ready.' I'll give you the address now. Fourteen Wexford Row, Clerkenwell. It's just past Myddelton Square going towards Sadler's Wells. Butterfield's name is on the door. You just knock twice gently, you needn't make no row. We'll hear you."

"Fourteen Wexford Row, Clerkenwell," said Harry. "I shall remember. There's nothing more for the present, I suppose?"

"Nothing more for the present, I think," said Mr. Butterfield rising.

There was a cordial hand-shaking all round, and the amateur detective took his leave.

There were two young men standing at the door of the house as he descended the stairs. They stood on one side for him to pass, and when he had got some score of yards away one of them retired to his own room on the ground floor, and the other sauntered after the disappearing figure and never lost sight of it until the Westminster Hotel was reached.

Mr. Butterfield was driven away with his companions in the little brougham which awaited him at the door, and Miss Priscilla went back to Gilead.

"Well?" she said in a tone of mocking inquiry.

"Well!" answered Gilead drily.

"I suppose you've let that hulkin' stranger into all your secrets."

"You make me sick," said Gilead. "Go away."

"I'm going," she answered, and Gilead noticed for the first time that she was attired for the streets and that she carried a small black hand-bag.

"You are, are you?" Gilead responded. "And where do you suppose you're going to?"

"I'm going away for a day—or two, perhaps," she answered. "Perhaps I'm going to Manchester."

"What are you going to Manchester for?" Gilead asked.

"You don't tell me your business," Priscilla responded, "and I sha'n't tell you mine. Good morning Gilead."

Gilead sat tugging at his goat tuft, staring at her

with his dead blue eyes, and she looked back at him with a smile of peculiar meaning. Before either of them spoke again, the maid appeared to say that the cab was ready, and that the portmanteau had already been taken down stairs.

“Good-bye, Gilead,” said Priscilla. “I dare say I shall be back to-morrow.”

“Don’t you hurry on my account, darling,” Gilead answered. The tone was intended for the maid’s ears, and Priscilla received the viperous look which accompanied it with no change in the expression she wore.

She tripped down stairs, settled herself composedly in the cab, and drove away. She had not gone a hundred yards before she opened the small handbag, and took from it a lady’s card. “Mrs. Ronald Morton, née Melikoff, The Hulme, St. Peters.”

“I reckon,” said Priscilla, “*she* ought to know Willie Reid, if I don’t,” and with that she returned the card and closed the black bag with a decisive snap.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR three days Inthia had been in trouble. Her earliest interview with the returned wanderer had brought disturbance with it, but that had had time to subside, and she had succeeded in persuading herself that she had felt nothing but the shock of meeting the man who had stood by Harry's side at the moment of his death. She wilfully obscured her memory of the strange half-recognition which had so amazed and startled her. There was no need for her to arrange her own conclusions in set form. They were already too definite and too assured. Harry was dead, and Ronald Morton's likeness to him could be no more than fortuitous. She dreaded to speak of the likeness, and was all the more unwilling to break silence because nobody else had remarked it. The old Earl, Lord Hounes, Lady McCorquodale and Humphrey Frost had all known Harry so intimately, that if the likeness she had found between him and Ronald Morton had been more than fanciful, they would surely have observed it.

It was none the less, but perhaps all the more, troublesome to her on this account. She carried the thought of it, like a guilty secret, in her blameless breast. Her mind dwelt more than ever on the memory of her boy lover, and she awoke from her own thoughts in an actual terror to find that Harry had taken the form, the voice, the bearing of Ronald Morton. The very thoughts that did homage to the sacred dead linked themselves about this mere stranger. She tried to hide herself in the memory of Harry, and recalled eagerly a thousand trifles of which she had not thought since his death. She strove to fence herself about with these recollections, but the bronzed face looked through them, or some sudden and unbidden note of Morton's voice sounded in her ears in place of the tones she strove to recall. Her very devotion led her unconsciously to a thousand repetitions of this airy infidelity.

She was a woman of rare common sense, and made a strong fight against her fancies, refusing for a time to admit that they troubled her at all, and for a while she could succeed in expelling them from her mind. But at length, by mere force of persistence, they conquered her, and Harry Wynne and Ronald Morton became actually intertwined.

One natural result of all this was a fear of again encountering the traveller. She was averse to the social subterfuges employed by so many of her sex, and had never counterfeited a headache in her life. There was no other excuse than illness to fall back upon, and she was pledged for Lady Mabel's ball. She felt that she would infinitely prefer not to meet

Ronald Morton again, and she resolved that if the meeting were unescapable, as it seemed to be, it should at least be as transitory as she could make it.

Thursday came, and with it came Lady Mabel, attired for the Archbishop's garden party. She sailed into Inthia's room, beaming with good humour.

"My dear," she said, holding both hands behind her, and tiptoeing over Inthia as she spoke, "I am quite fascinated by our new lion. I have been hunting everywhere to get a portrait of him, and only ten minutes ago I succeeded. I was driving through Ebury-street when it occurred to me to try once more at Downey's. The photograph was not for sale, and I had to wheedle for it. Isn't he a superb creature—the lion? Doesn't he carry the airs of his deserts with him?"

She drew the photograph from its envelope, and held it aloft in her delicately-gloved fingers, gazing at it with a droll affectation of rapture. Inthia reached out a hand for it, but her ladyship waltzed away.

"No, no! I can't part with my lion. You may take a peep at him through the bars." She held her fingers across the photograph to simulate the bars. "He frightened you terribly on Monday, but after all I am disposed to fancy that there is very little danger about him. Inthia, my dear, you are blushing.

"Nonsense," said Inthia feebly. "Let me look at it."

Lady Mabel surrendered the photograph, and Inthia, resting it against a vase upon the mantelpiece, fell to

studying it so earnestly that in the first three seconds she forgot her friend's presence. The good-hearted and agreeable rattlepate, her companion, stood by with an aspect of demure mischief, and waited. Inthia folded her hands behind her, and her eyes began to dream. She looked long and intently at the portrait, and awoke from her fancies with a sigh, at which Lady Mabel broke into a peal of fairy laughter. Inthia met her look of raillery with grave self-possession.

"There is something in the face," she said, "which puzzles me. I seem to know it well, but the likeness constantly evades me."

She hated to be dishonest, but she was by no means disposed to make Lady Mabel a partaker of her secret. With the face of Ronald Morton actually pictured before her, she seemed to read Harry in every lineament. The eyes, frank and honest, and at once tender and courageous, were Harry's to the life. The brow was Harry's. The curling beard and heavy moustache obscured the lower outlines of the face, and gave them a manliness and decision foreign to the remembrances, yet very far from being contradictory of them. Over and over again in looking on the portrait, her fancy effaced all differences, and the smooth, boyish countenance looked out at her unchanged.

Lady Mabel fluttered off to find Lady McCorquodale, and Inthia was left alone. She studied the photograph anew, until a half angry gust of defensive shame touched her, and she put it resolutely away. She was not going to be disloyal to her memories because of any likeness, howsoever striking, and she

began to think that Ronald Morton was exciting a dangerous interest in her mind.

Do what she would she thought of him. Her resolutions were the merest ropes of sand, and, however industriously she wove them, they broke at the first touch. The mere memory of Ronald Morton's voice and eyes undid her strongest resolve, and her whole day was passed in thinking of him, and his strange resemblance to Harry, and in the effort to expel him from her thoughts.

The night passed in much the same fashion, and long before the hour came at which it was necessary to dress for Lady Mabel's ball, her disinclination to meet him had grown into something like an actual fear. What she dreaded most of all was a certain secret complacency which underlay her reluctance to encounter him. She feared the meeting, and yet there was pleasure in the thought of it. She took herself seriously to task, but with no effect. She could not dismiss from her own thoughts the interest the stranger bred there.

The hour arrived, and she reached the ball-room in a flutter of suppressed excitement.

"The lion," said Lady Mabel, whispering her, "is the best, the most amiable and punctual of lions. He is here already, most unlionlike in modesty. One can see that he is not expérimenté—he has not learned the value of his name."

Lady Mabel's rooms as yet gave but a half promise of the condition of fashionable crush they were destined to reach an hour later, and Inthia had not been in the house five minutes when she found Ronald

Morton bending over her. He was asking for a dance, and she felt like a raw girl on her first introduction to the world. She had prepared herself for this, and had meant, if the request were proffered, to meet it with any excuse the moment might afford, but almost before she knew it she had accepted, and was pencilling Mr. Ronald Morton's name upon her card with trembling fingers. She had not even enough of the self-protective instinct left to put him far down on the list in the hope of escaping before the time came. She was a little surprised to discover that the desire to escape had vanished.

Humphrey Frost came to claim her for a quadrille, and this gave her time to steady herself a little, but she had never known the dance to pass with so much swiftness. The young people of to-day, even the staidest of them, are not apt to look on the quadrille as a source of delirious excitement, but to Inthia's fancy it was whirled through with an almost indecorous celerity. In her dread of the approaching waltz she would have taken it at a funeral pace, and even that might have seemed too quick for her.

She was perfectly self-possessed to all outward appearances when she stood up for the waltz, with Ronald Morton's arm about her waist, but her heart was actually rioting in her bosom. The band had sounded its lively flourish of warning, and with its first plunge into the waltz movement the two floated away together. The Asiatic deserts are not the best dancing school in the world, and Harry, in his eagerness to secure Inthia for a partner, had overlooked the fact that he had not so much as seen a dance for

the last seven years. In the first half-dozen steps he floundered, and striving to recover himself canoned against a ponderous elderly gentleman who glared at him angrily in return.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Grey," he murmured. "This is not an experiment upon which I should have ventured. I have spoiled your dance for you, and I am very sorry."

He extricated her rather clumsily from the whirling crowd, and proffered her his arm. She took it, hardly knowing what she did, and unconscious of the smiles which her companion's failure excited. Harry was as unconscious as herself, for the mere contact of her hand upon his arm, though it rested there as light as a snowflake, filled him with a splendid exultation. He was near to the end he had set before himself. To-morrow he would proclaim his identity to the world, and at that moment no shadow of a doubt as to Inthia's reception of him rested on his mind.

Before he well knew it they were walking alone in the half gloom of a conservatory. She was the first to discover that they had withdrawn from the crowd, and hastily removing her hand she murmured an inarticulate something, and turned away. She never knew, then or afterwards, if it were terror or the assurance of an almost awful joy which shook her as he laid his hand upon her shoulder. She turned towards him, and their eyes met. He was bending over her, and his look seemed to devour her.

"Inthia!" he said. She gave no answer, but his eyes fascinated her. "Don't you know me?"

He caught her swiftly as she was in the act of

falling. He supported her with one arm about her waist, and the other beneath her head, and she lay in his arms like a drooping flower. Her face was colourless, but there was no fear in his mind. He kissed her again and again. Her eyes opened, the colour flowed back to her face, and she threw both arms about him.

"I knew it," she sobbed, "I knew it. It was impossible, and yet I knew it."

For a long time they clung to each other in a silence only broken by Inthia's stifled sobs, and now and again a soothing murmur from Harry.

"I wanted to declare myself," he said, "from the first moment, but I had not the courage. When Hogan asked me to see Lord Hounes I consented, because you were to be away. You forgive me for that?"

There was no need to ask. The clinging arms and fast flowing tears told all.

"I have strange things to tell you, darling, when you are strong enough to listen. I will not trouble you with them now."

"I am listening, dear," she answered. "Tell me everything."

He found a seat for her, and threw open the conservatory door, letting in the air of the balmy night from the garden. The moon, nearly at the full, hung low over the neighbouring roofs, and its light fell full upon her face. He seated himself beside her, and took her hands in his.

"I had not meant to speak to-night," he said, "but I could not help it. I should have told the world

to-morrow, and you first of all. I had a reason for the delay. I stayed away seven years to make an honourable life for myself. When I came home I found I had assumed the alias of a rascal, a thief and forger. But the hand of heaven was in it. He belonged to the very gang which brought about my ruin, and when they learned that Ronald Morton was in London the scoundrels took me for their old companion. I encouraged their belief, and to-night shall have in my hands the actual proof of their last villainy. I shall punish the heartless rascals that parted you and me, and I shall do a service to the world at large. I am expecting every moment the message which will call me to them."

As if the words were the cue for Lady Mabel's entrance she came into the conservatory at that moment, and caught sight of the couple sitting hand in hand. She started back for a mere second, and then advanced with an unusual frigidity of manner.

"Mr. Morton," she said icily, "your secretary has brought a note which he describes as being most urgent."

Harry thanked her, and took the missive from her hand. He tore it open, and read by the moonlight the simple words "Proofs ready."

"My darling," he said, turning to Inthia, "the message I expected."

At this endearing epithet her ladyship fairly stared.

"Inthia!" she breathed, in a tone of concentrated astonishment.

Inthia rose and embraced her, half crying, half laughing.

"Mabel, you don't know what has happened. This is my cousin Harry come to life again."

Her ladyship was stricken dumb. She was fluent enough as a rule, but for once in her life the power of speech deserted her.

"My dear Lady Mabel," said Harry, "it is true. I have had a reason for remaining unknown, but to-morrow morning all that will be over. I must go now. Good-bye, Inthia. God bless you, my darling. I shall see you in the morning. I must go. You know my reasons for it. Good-bye again, dear."

He had both her hands in his own, and even in Lady Mabel's presence he could not refrain from kissing them. A minute later the two women were left to themselves, Inthia repeated Harry's story, and Lady Mabel had a rare feast of emotion. She cried for sympathy and laughed for joy, and in short gave way so completely that in a very little while it was Inthia's office to calm her and to remind her of her absence from her guests. At this her volatile ladyship dried her tears, and producing a powder-puff set to work to remove their traces on her own face.

"I am a fright, my darling, and I am sure you are another. Come with me to my rooms. We must really make ourselves presentable."

She led Inthia through the conservatory, and they escaped together by the servants' staircase.

Re-entering the ball-room five minutes later they were encountered at the door-way by Humphrey Frost, who wore an expression altogether enigmatic, half shocked, half amused, and wholly wonder-stricken.

"Lady Mabel," said Frost, "you have been entertaining angels unawares."

"We have indeed," said Lady Mabel, whose butterfly mind was dangerously charged with the news of the night.

"I have a curious surprise to give you."

"We have a curious surprise to give you," her ladyship answered with sparkling eyes. "Let us see whose is the greater."

"Yours," said Frost, becoming altogether serious, "would seem to be altogether agreeable. Mine, I am afraid, is not."

"Let us know it. Nothing can dash our joy to-night. For once we are armed against disaster. Your looks are as a gaoler to bring forth some monstrous malefactor. Speak!"

"You really ought to know—" said Frost hesitatingly. "The fellow has left the house, and has walked clean into the trap the police have set for him."

"The police!" said Lady Mabel. "My house! Of whom are you talking?"

"I am really awfully sorry to say it," said Frost with an irrepressible twinkle, "but I am talking of your Asiatic lion."

Lady Mabel's eyes danced at this, and she passed an arm through Inthia's.

"What of the Asiatic lion?" she asked innocently "I promised him that he should not be hunted."

"He is being hunted with a vengeance," Frost returned. "Let me tell you the plain story. You remember the bonds which belonged to me being stolen in transit between Boulogne and Calais? They

were stolen, as we know now, by two men, respectively named Gilead Gilfoil and William Reid. William Reid is a notorious forger, a skilled distributor of forged bank-notes, and is at this moment on his way to take up a packet of forged notes from his confederate."

"What has all this to do with the Asiatic lion?" her ladyship demanded.

"It sounds terrible," said Frost. "It reminds one of Barrington and the days of the Regency. William Reid, dear ladies, is no other than Ronald Morton."

"We have a prettier story than that," said her ladyship. The career of the Asiatic lion shall come to a more agreeable close. From whom did you get this charming narrative, Mr. Frost?"

"I got it," said Frost gravely, "from an unimpeachable source. It came to me a quarter of an hour since only from M. Vergueil, a member of the detective staff of Paris, who has hunted this man and his comrades for seven years, and he will have them arrested by the English police to-night."

"Really," cried Lady Mabel, "this is delightfully interesting, but you are a day behind the fair, Mr. Frost. Inthia and I knew this half-an-hour ago, Mr. Frost. No, you sha'n't be plagued any longer, and in place of talking folly and making mystery about it, we ought to be on our knees and saying our prayers for thankfulness. Ronald Morton is not William Reid, Mr. Frost. He is Harry Wynne. He is not a confederate of these vile people, but is bringing to justice with his own hands the wicked wretches who ruined him seven years ago."

Frost looked from one to the other in profound astonishment, then with a stammered word of excuse turned away, struggled unceremoniously through the brilliant crowd which filled the ball-room, ran swiftly down the stairs, and dashing bare-headed into the street, hailed a passing hansom and leapt into it. He thrust a sovereign through the trap of the cab.

"Drive for your life!" he shouted. "Clerkenwell! There may be a terrible fight," he said to himself, "before these men are captured. The police must know with whom they have to deal, or Harry may lose his life."

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Mr. Butterfield chose his supplementary workshop in Clerkenwell he did it under the advice of his friend Captain Heaton, who was curiously careful as to the means of egress and ingress the place afforded. The house at fourteen Wexford Row was practically open on all four sides. Parallel with Wexford Row, at the back of the house and its adjoining yard, ran an alley leading to a mews. On the right side of the house a narrow passage between high walls formed a means of communication between the alley and the street, and on the left side beyond the party-wall lay the yard of the neighbouring public-house. In the yard of number fourteen Mr. Butterfield erected a workshop, and the workshop opened on to the lane and the alley by means of doors purposely constructed, whilst access might be had to the public-house yard through a square low window. Some of Mr. Butterfield's workmen had found a short way to their beer by means of that window, and the potman and landlord of the house were conveniently familiar with their irruptions.

The astute Heaton had overlooked the fact that in multiplying opportunities for the dispersion of his workpeople in case of need, he had multiplied opportunities for the entrance of any persons who might be seeking an unexpected interview with them. But one of the myrmidons of M. Vergueil having closely surveyed the ground, Monsieur had asked to have no fewer than ten men placed at his disposal. These ten were under the charge of an inspector who was proud to be associated with the distinguished foreigner. Two of the men were posted in the bar-parlour of the public-house, two in the cab-yard at one end of the alley, and two at the entrance of that narrow thoroughfare. Wexford Row was patrolled by four, and the whole body was of course attired in plain clothes. The authorities had chosen their smartest men for the service, and had done their best to make the intended capture a certainty.

Frost's cabman, animated by the unusual fare paid him beforehand, drove madly until the packed traffic of Oxford-street brought him back to caution. In Hart-street and Theobald's Road he was free to move again, and tore along at racing pace. In Exmouth-street and Myddleton-street the scattered costers' stalls and the thin crowd spread about the horse road made him slow down once more, but in St. John-street-road Frost caught sight of the man of whom he was in pursuit in the act of discharging a cabman, and at once brought his own driver to a halt. He sprang from the cab, and advanced with both hands outstretched.

"My dear old Wynne!" he said. "Welcome back again. Lady Mabel has told me everything."

"Then Lady Mabel," said Harry, "has committed an indiscretion. I am heartily glad to see you, but I must leave you now. You can tell me to-morrow how you came to follow me. I have an engagement of the utmost importance."

"I know that too," Frost answered. "I must come with you. You are putting yourself in danger."

"I anticipate no great danger," said Harry. "I am armed, and I think I know my men."

"The house," Frost answered, "is to be surrounded by the police. You were to have been arrested with the others."

This tickled the returned wanderer, and he laughed aloud.

"There may be a *mêlée*," Frost went on. "One of the scoundrels is known to be desperate."

"What brings you in it? How do you come to know of it?"

"I am the owner of a heap of bonds these fellows stole seven years ago. I was told to-night that you were William Reid, and expected to see you in the dock to-morrow. There is no need now for you to move a step. The men are trapped already. You have the satisfaction of knowing you brought them all together. Let that be enough for you."

"I want my share in the comedy," said Harry. "It promises better than I fancied."

M. Vergueil had seen too many amazing things in his life time to be easily surprised, but wandering warily from man to man of his detachment in com-

pany with the inspector, to see that all things were properly disposed, he found accused and accuser walking amicably arm in arm, and stood for a moment rooted in astonishment. Frost caught sight of him and beckoned him. He crossed over, and listened to the extraordinary narrative detailed to him as if it had been the most ordinary in the world.

"Yes," he said, "I think it will be well for Mr. Wynne to enter as if he had not seen us at all."

"I had not expected your aid," said Harry, "but perhaps it is better as it is. Let me ask you not to permit your men to break in until I have secured possession of the notes."

"Very good, sir," said Vergueil. "Your wishes shall be considered."

"Shall I give you a signal?" asked Harry.

"No, thank you," returned Vergueil with extreme dryness. "We shall be aware of your proceedings."

"I had not expected you to be so easily convinced," said Frost to Vergueil when they were left alone.

"I had not expected you to be so easily convinced," returned the detective. "We shall see. You do not know your man, Mr. Frost. There is no fox in the world who has so many devices. There is no actor on the stage who is his master in comedy. He invents like the great Dumas—better, for the people believe him."

Harry had already knocked at the door of number fourteen Wexford Row, and had been admitted. Vergueil, holding Frost by the sleeve, led him swiftly past the house, and shot into the walled lane which

lay beside it. Half way towards the rear he paused, and spoke in a cautious whisper.

“There is a door which opens flush upon the room in which they all are met together. The room is surrounded, and there is no escape from it. If our friend is William Reid, we have him in spite of any trick which he may play. We shall give him no time to destroy our evidence. If he is Mr. Wynne, we shall be there to help him. Now, silence! Do not breathe.”

They moved on tiptoe to the door. The alley was black with the shadows of midnight, but there were two denser shadows in the midst of them. A sudden glare of light flashed out across the faces of Frost and his companion, and disappeared, but not a word was spoken. Two or three needle points of light showed redly through the crevices of the door. Vergueil, crouching, laid his ear against it, and listened. Frost placed himself opposite, and the two stood silent as a brace of statues.

Harry, having knocked at the door, was kept waiting for a little while, and in the light of the street lamp near at hand he read upon the neatly engraved brass plate before him, “Butterfield, Jeweller, Engraver, &c. Office and Show Rooms, Conduit-street.” He was thinking how much the etcetera covered, when a cautious step sounded in the hall within, and the door was partially opened. It was secured by a chain, and the face of an elderly woman peered round it.

“Who is it?” she asked.

“Mr. Ronald Morton.”

"All right, sir. Wait just half a minute." She closed the door for the removal of the chain and then re-opening it to no greater width than was necessary for the admission of the visitor, secured it anew behind him. "This way, sir. It's dark, but the road's quite level. The gentlemen's expecting of you."

The whole quartette awaited him.

"You're punctual, William," said Gilead, "and so are we. The flimsy's ready, old pardy."

Sitting in his wheeled chair beside the table, he made a motion with his hand, indicating a neat pile of paper which lay beside him. Mr. Butterfield laid a pair of caressing palms upon the upper sheet, and smiled.

"We have been looking over them," said Captain Heaton. "I don't think I ever saw anything so flawless. Mr. Gilfoil certainly deserves to be congratulated on his success."

"There's a thousand of 'em," said Gilead. "There's a thousand more that ain't quite dry, but they'll be ready in the morning. You can start on these, and you can have the second batch for Paris. We should ha' been ready a day earlier if the numberin' machine hadn't ha' broken down."

"I'd better take charge of this lot," said Harry.

"Butterfield'll pack 'em for you," returned Gilead. "He'll do it neat. He's used to it."

Mr. Butterfield smilingly obeyed this hint, but whilst he was still at work, and the others stood about him watching, they were all startled by a ring at the front door bell. Mr. Butterfield went ghastly white, and stared from one to another with his lips

drawn back in a frightened, attentive grin, which showed all the gold stopping of his teeth. Heaton, almost as white as the jeweller, drew a revolver from his pocket, and laid it on the table.

"You don't want that," said Harry, and possessed himself coolly of the weapon.

Gilead, sitting silent with a wicked, glittering eye, took a cigarette case from his pocket, and toyed with it with his long blanched fingers.

"You ain't got no need to tremble the house down," said Gilead, addressing Hump. "If it had been anybody to be afraid of they'd ha' been in by now."

There was a tap at the door, and the old woman thrust her head in.

"If you please, sir, here's Miss Priscilla. She says she must see you immediate, and she won't take 'no' for an answer."

Gilead returned the cigarette case to his pocket, and setting his wheeled chair in motion, passed through the doorway into the covered passage leading to the house.

"You needn't run over me," said his sister's voice from the darkness. "Get a light, and come into one of the front rooms. I want to talk to you."

Gilead, having called on the old woman for a light, followed the girl without a word, but while they stood waiting in the darkened hall he cried out suddenly,

"There's some one here. Who is it?"

"It's all right, Gilead. It's a friend of mine," Priscilla answered.

The housekeeper came from the lower regions of

the house, leaving a candle, and in its light Gilead made out a pretty and delicate woman, richly dressed. She looked nervous and alarmed, and laid a timid hand on Priscilla's shoulder, as if asking for her protection.

"You can go," said Priscilla, taking the candle and addressing the housekeeper. The old woman obeyed, and the girl placed a chair for her visitor. "This is my brother Gilead. Gilead, this is Mrs. Ronald Morton."

"Proud to make your acquaintance, m'm," said Gilead, with an angry pretence of politeness, "but just now I'm particularly busy."

He was wheeling his chair away with a savage glance at Priscilla when she interposed herself between him and the door.

"You've got to listen, Gilead," she said. "This lady married Ronald Morton in Phillipopolis seven years ago. I have taken the trouble to find her out in Manchester, and she has taken the trouble to come down here to identify the man, if he is the man, and if he isn't, to prove to you that you have been deceived."

"Well," said Gilead, with a sigh, "you've got your cranks, and I know 'em of old. I shayn't get rid of you till I've shown you what a fool you are. Come along, both of you."

He snatched the candle from the table, and motioned imperiously to Priscilla to open the door. Then, balancing the candlestick upon his knees, he led the way. At the end of the covered passage he paused and turned his head.

"Hold on to that," he said roughly to Priscilla, extending the candle towards her. "Wait there, and don't come in till I tell you."

He rapped at the workroom door and was admitted, leaving the two women in the passage.

"Stow them parcels away," he whispered to Butterfield. "Cap. throw that blanket over the press. Come in!" he cried, raising his voice.

The two women entered, and Priscilla, clutching her companion by the arm, held out a denouncing finger towards Harry Wynne.

"That's the man," she said, "that calls himself Ronald Morton. "Is that your husband?"

"No," said the other, in a frightened voice. "I do not know him."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Priscilla, turning to her brother, "there were two Ronald Morton's in Philippopolis when this lady was married? *I* tell you it ain't the man, and I ought to know. Ronald Morton's wife tells you it ain't the man, and she ought to know. You've been fooled, and made a tool of."

"Whilst the girl was speaking Gilead kept his eyes fixed upon her face, but when she closed he turned towards Harry, and saw him in the act of sliding one of Mr. Butterfield's neatly arranged parcels into the pocket of his overcoat.

"William," he said, "you seem to be kinder taking this thing to heart."

For sole answer Harry set his back against the wall, and drew out a revolver, looking about him with a calm and wary eye. His face wore a

smile, and he played with the revolver with both hands.

"That'll do," said Gilead, turning. "You ladies can retire. You needn't be frightened, my darlin's, but this gentleman and me is going to have a little explanation. Cap'n, be good enough to open the door and show the ladies a light."

He had drawn out the cigarette case again, and, opening it, he took out one of the small, pencil-like syringes it contained.

"If you ain't Ronald Morton," he said, "you ain't William Reid. Now perhaps you'll be good enough to tell us who you are. We want to know and we're going to know."

He drew towards him a soiled envelope which lay on the table, and made a pretence of pencilling casual lines upon it.

"Come along, stranger. Don't be bashful. Introduce yourself."

He wheeled his chair round the table, and halted within three or four feet of the declared enemy. The diabolic little syringe in his hands looked altogether harmless. His white fingers toyed with it, and no man noticed their action as they unscrewed the metal cap which covered the point. A greyish green crept over the papery whiteness of his face, his shining teeth were bared, and tightly clenched together, and his eyebrows were raised with a look of altogether devilish daring and astuteness.

"Who are you, anyway?"

"My good sir," said Harry, "you and your companions are responsible for any error which may

have arisen with respect to my identity. My real name, I fancy, concerns you very little. Captain Heaton, Mr. Butterfield, and Mr. Whale will recognise it readily. Those three hunted me to my ruin seven years ago. I think we cry quits now. I am Harry Wynne!"

Butterfield leapt to his feet with a stifled exclamation, and clutched his sparse hair with both hands. Heaton and Whale rose with an echo of his cry, but before either could advance a step Gilead's finger touched the button of the syringe, a suffocating odour filled the room, and Harry, with a wild convulsed motion of face and body, gasped once and fell forward. As he fell he pressed the trigger of the revolver, a shot resounded, and the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the floor.

"Great Heaven!" cried Whale, "what have you done? You've killed him!"

"I ain't yet," said Gilead, "but I'm goin' to."

"No hanging job for me," Whale shrieked, and as Gilead stooped over the prostrate man with a second syringe in his hand he sent him flying. At that instant a crashing and battering noise seemed to rise everywhere, and from the two outer doors and the window men came pouring in. The front door of the house resisted for a while the tremendous blows which rained upon it, and the screams of the women rang from the darkened passage. The four conspirators were seized and handcuffed each in the turn of a hand, and Frost stood over the prostrate body.

"There's anhydrous acid here!" he cried. "He has been poisoned."

There were two or three great vessels of water in the room, and seizing one of them, he emptied its contents from a height upon the head of the unconscious man. "Help me here!" He tore the shirt collar apart, and dashed water in double handfuls in Harry's face. "Bring more water!" One of the plain clothes' men rushed out with an empty bucket towards the mews. He returned with it almost instantly. In the meantime Frost had made another of the men mount the table, and was handing him jug after jug of water to pour upon the back of the sufferer's neck. At length a terrible, convulsive shudder ran through Harry's frame, and he writhed as if in mortal agony.

"He is dying," said Vergueil.

"No!" said Frost. "He is saved!"

L'ENVOI.

THE Earl and Countess of Bridgebourne sat together after breakfast at Bridgebourne Court on a delightful morning in early summer. The children—her ladyship boasted two, a healthy and wholesomely imperious prince of five, and a shy and gentle feminine copy of him two years younger—had been brought down from the nursery to be present at the opening of a surprise packet from Uncle Frost, sent to celebrate the younger's birthday. Hogan, still worshipfully in love with Lady Bridgebourne, as he had been of old with Inthia Grey, had solicited the honour of bearing the toys to Bridgebourne Court, and looked well pleased. The children were so exuberant in their joy that they were threatened with the nurse, and at length Inthia, rising, led them through the folding doors into the next room, each bearing a double handful of wonders of Uncle Frost's providing.

"Hogan," said Harry, "you're odd this morning. There's something on your mind."

"Faith, there is then," the good medico answered,

"I didn't like to mention it before her ladyship, but wun of those rascals is loose again. He'll do no more mischief, poor devil, for he's dyin' as fast as he knows how to."

"Who is it?" Harry asked.

"'Tis Captain Heaton, the leader of the whole black gang. The prison life has broken him down, and he's out on a ticket-of-leave. He's lying in a garret in Soho, among a lot of Frenchmen and Germans, and he's scarcely a rag to his back or a morsel to his mouth."

"Inthia!" Harry called. "Come here for a moment." She entered smilingly. "Tell your story over again, Hogan."

Lady Bridgebourne listened with a face of pity.

"What shall you do, Harry? The poor wretch has been punished heavily enough."

"You are right, my dear," said Harry, "as you always are. Hogan, will you be my executioner? Don't let him know from whom it comes." He handed a bank-note to the doctor. "Let me know when he needs more."

THE END.

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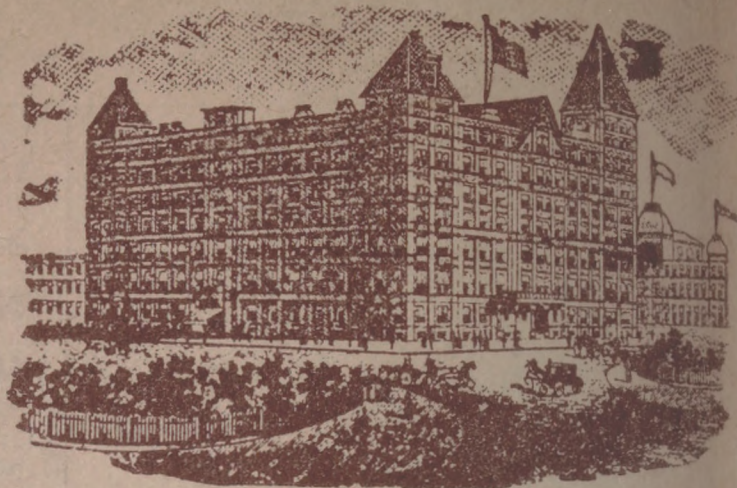
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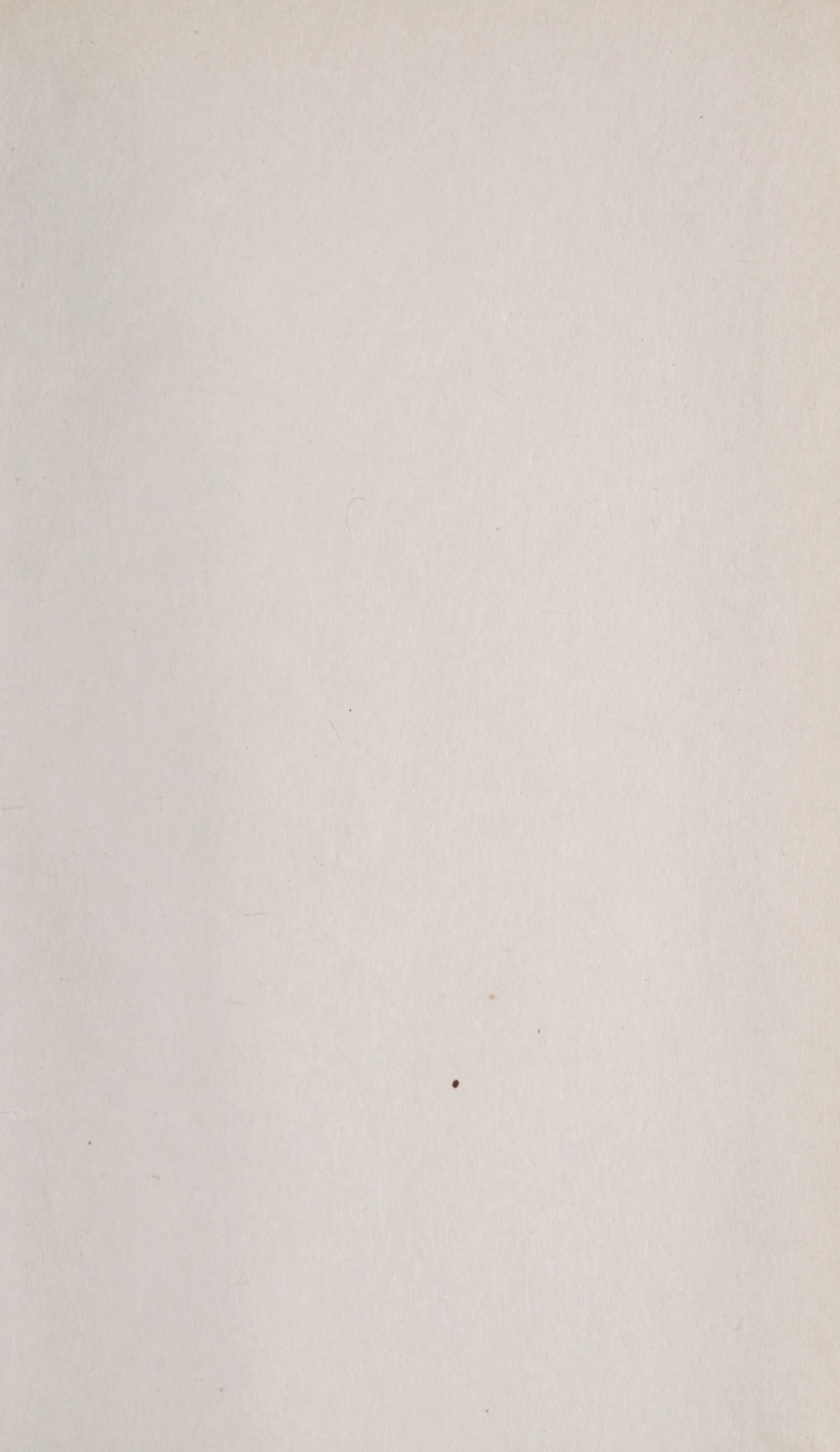
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